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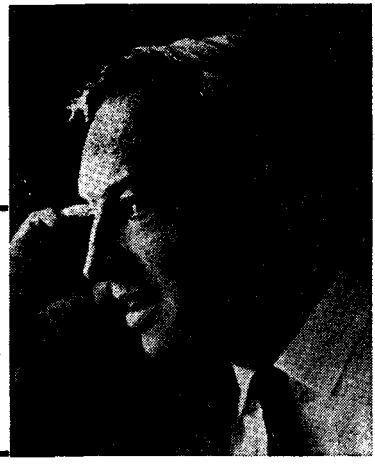

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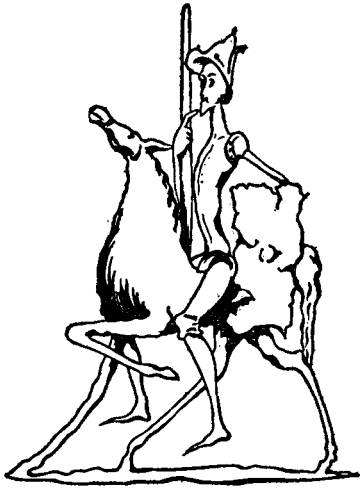

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The Paris Review is published by The Paris Review, S.A.R.L. au capital de 10.000 fr. Vol 9, N° 36. Numéro de presse 26.295. Winter 1966. European editorial & publication office at 17, rue de Tournon, Paris 6e. USA editorial & distribution office at 45–39 171 Place, Flushing 58, NY. Representative in all countries except France & USA: Jonathan Cape Limited, Thirty Bedford Square, London, W.C.1. Distributed in the USA by Eastern News Company & Doubleday & Co. Official representation of The Paris Review Inc. of New York in France, Société Tourvoy, 17, rue de Tournon, Paris 6e. La gerante: Mme Colette Duhamel. Printed in the Netherlands by Koninklijke Drukkerij G.J.Thieme, N.V. Nijmegen.

Price per single copy in France: 5.00 fr. In the USA: $ 1.25. In the UK: 6/-. Postpaid subscription for four copies in France: 21 fr. In francs outside France: 22 fr. In the USA: $ 4.00. In the UK & sterling area: £ 1.7.4.

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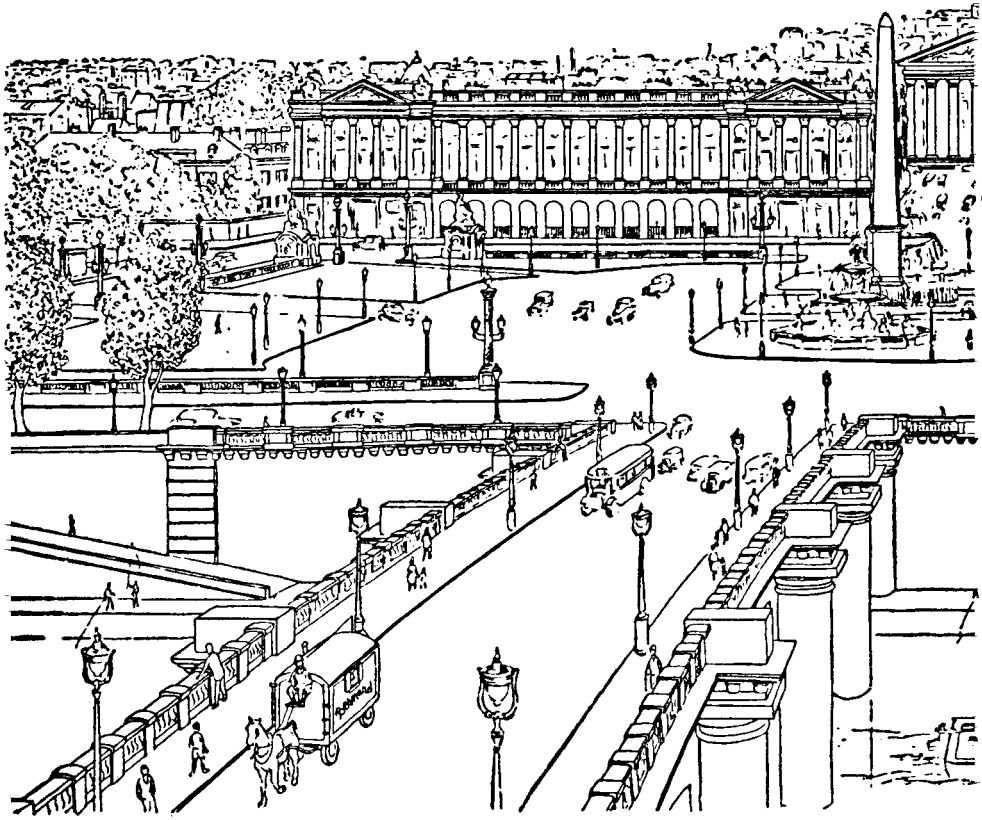

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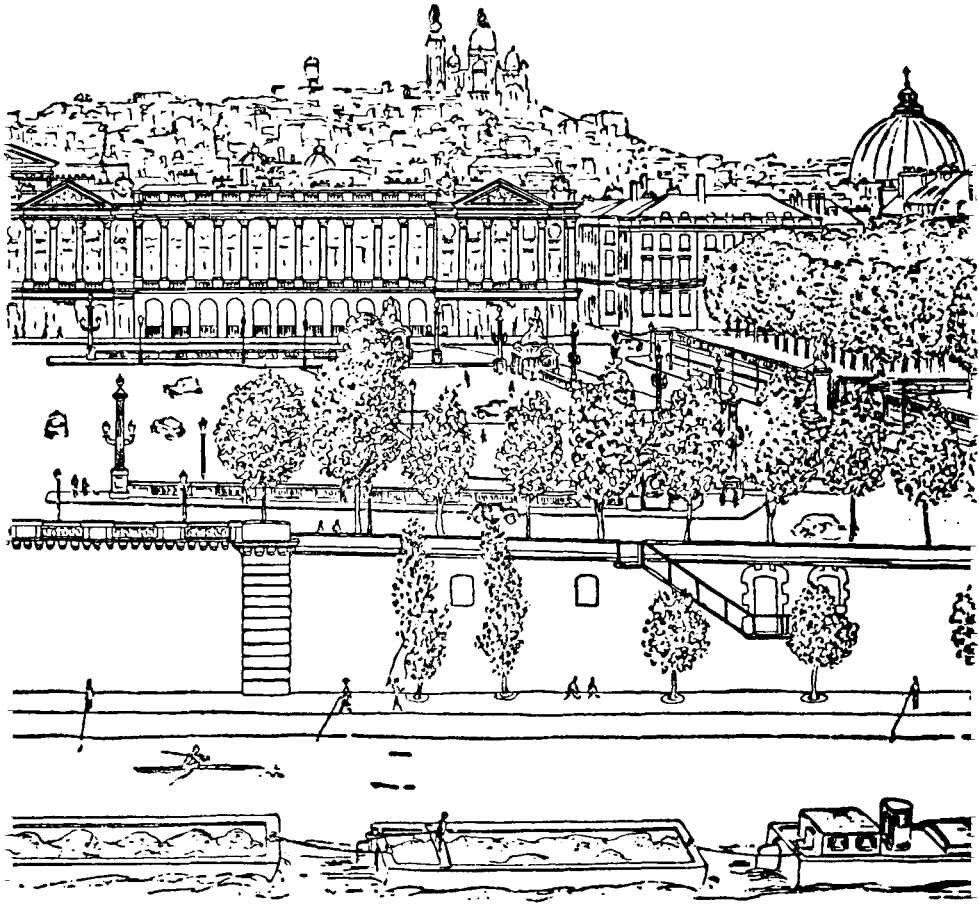

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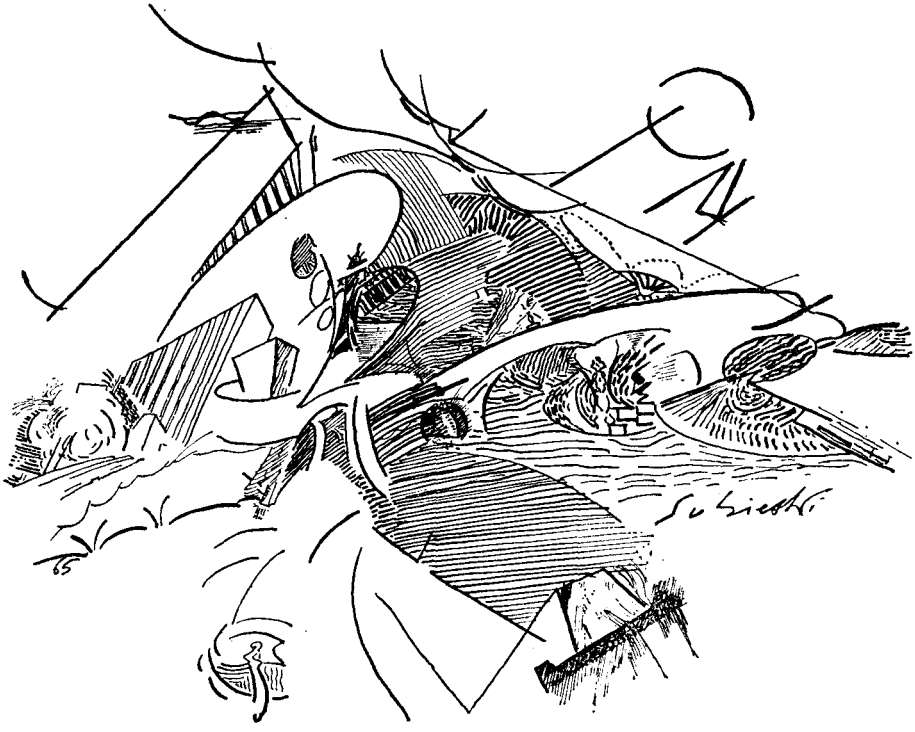

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Virginia: 1831

William Styron

The following is an excerpt from a novel entitled The Confessions of Nat Turner, *based on the life of the leader of the only effective, sustained revolt in the annals of American Negro slavery.*

Hark always declared that he could distinguish between good white people and bad white people—and even white people who lay between good and bad—by their smell alone. He was very solemn about all this; over the years he had worked out many subtleties and refinements upon his original philosophy, and he could talk endlessly as we worked alongside each other—advising me at the top of his voice, assigning exact, marvelous odors to white people like Moses handing down the law. About much of this he was deadly serious, and as he jabbered away his broad, bold face would become furrowed in the most worrisome thought; but Hark's nature was basically humorous, outwardgoing, beneficent, serene, and he could not long sustain a somber mood, even though many horrible things had happened to him.

Finally something connected with a white person and a certain smell would tickle some interior nerve: against all restraint the giggles would begin to well up from his belly and in an instant he would have broken down clutching himself in helpless, wheezing, rich, delirious laughter. "Now Nat, maybe it jes' *me*," he would begin seriously, "but dis yere nose of mine she jes' get better ev'y day. Like I was comin' roun' side of de barn yestiddy evenin' and dere's ole Miss Maria a-feedin' the chickens. She seed me afore I could take off. 'Hark!' say she. 'Hark! Come right here!' So I come, an' already my nose begin twitchin' like a mushrat pokin' up

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out'n de swamp. 'Hark!' say she. 'Whar de corn?' 'Why, what corn, Miss Maria?' say I, de ole smell gittin' strong now. 'De corn in de shed for the chickens!' de ole bitch say. 'You suppose' to have a couple bushels shelled fo' my chickens and there ain't a cupful lef'! Dis de fourth time in a month! You a shiftless black nigger scoundrel and I pray to see de day my brother sells you off to Georgia! *Git* dat corn shelled right now, you shiftless nigger!' Jesus jumpin' Judas, de smell, Nat, comin' out dat woman, if it was water 'twould have drown' me in my shoes. What it like? 'Twas like an ole catfish somebody lef' three days up on a stump in July." And he would begin to softly giggle, already clutching at his midriff. "Stink! Even de buzzards fly away from ole pussy like dat!" And glorious laughter.

But they not all had smells like this, according to Hark. Mr. Joseph Travis, our master, had "a right honest stench about him," said Hark, "like a good horse what worked him up a sweat." Joel Westbrook, the boy whom Travis employed as an apprentice, was an uncertain, gawky lad, given to temper fits but amiable, even generous when in the mood; hence to Hark his smell had a changing, fitful quality: "Sometime dat boy smell right pretty, like hay or somethin', other time he smell up a storm." This offensive Miss Maria Pope was to Hark, however, in every way consistent in her smell. She was Travis' half-sister, who had come down from Petersburg to live with Travis and his family after her mother's death. A bony, angular woman, she suffered from blocked sinuses which caused her to breathe through her mouth; as a result her lips were always peeling to the quick and sometimes bled, which necessitated a poultice of lard, and this gave her ever-parted mouth a blanched appearance altogether ghostly and strange. Her eyes wandered distantly, and she was given to stroking her wrists. She hated us Negroes, who were at her beck and call, with a kind of profound and pointless hatred which was all the more burdensome to us because she was not really of the family, and therefore her attitude had a harsh, remote, despotic quality. On summer nights, from the windows of the upstairs room where she slept, I could hear her

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sobbing hysterically and crying out for her departed mother. She was about forty, I suspect a virgin, and she read aloud from the Bible incessantly with a kind of hollow-eyed, mesmeric urgency, her favorite passages being John 13 which deals with humility and charity, and the sixth chapter of I Timothy, beginning: *Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.* Indeed, according to Hark, she once flattened him up against the porch wall and made him repeat this homily until he had committed it to memory. I have no doubt that she was more than a little cracked, but this did not diminish my intense dislike of Miss Maria Pope, though occasionally I felt myself feeling sorry for her against my better nature.

But Miss Maria is, in a manner of speaking, only incidental to a man I am trying to get at in roundabout fashion—namely, Mr. Jeremiah Cobb, the judge who was about to sentence me to death, and into whose earlier acquaintance I was led by a complicated series of transactions which I must here try briefly to describe.

I was born the property of Benjamin Turner, about whom I remember very little. Upon his abrupt death when I was around eight or nine (a miller and dealer in timber, he was killed while felling a cypress tree, having turned his back on the monster at an improvident moment), I passed by bequest into the possession of his brother, Samuel Turner, whose property I remained for ten or eleven years. These years, and those preceding them, I shall return to in due course. Eventually Samuel Turner's health declined, and there were other problems; he was unable to continue to operate the sawmill he inherited, along with me, from his brother, and so for the first time I was sold, to Mr. Thomas Moore—a sale which a weakness for irony impels me to remark was effected at the instant I reached my manhood, on the very day I became twenty-one. I was the property of Mr. Moore, who was a

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small farmer, for nine years until his death. (Another bizarre misadventure: Moore broke his skull while presiding at the birth of a calf. It had been a balky delivery, and he had wrapped a cord around the calf's protruding hooves in order to yank it out; as he sweated and tugged and as the calf mused at him soulfully from the damp membranes of its afterbirth, the cord snapped, catapulting him backwards and fatally against a gatepost. I had very little use for Moore, and my grief was meager, yet at the time I could not but help begin to wonder if ownership of me did not presage a diminution of fortune, as does the possession, I am told, of a certain kind of elephant in India.) Upon Mr. Moore's demise I became the property of his son, Putnam, who was then fifteen. The following year (that is to say, the year before now, or 1830) Mr. Moore's widow, Miss Sarah, married Joseph Travis, a childless widower of fifty-five desirous of offspring who lived in this same country region of Cross Keys, an expert wheelwright by trade and the last person so luckless as to enjoy me in the pride of ownership. For although under law I was Putnam's by title, I belonged also to Travis, who had the right to exercise full control over me until Putnam reached his majority. Thus when Miss Sarah wed Joseph Travis and became domiciled beneath his roof, I turned into a kind of twofold property—not an unheard-of arrangement but additionally unsatisfying to property already half-deranged at being owned even once.

Travis was moderately prosperous, which is to say that like a few of the other inhabitants of this backwater, he managed to eke out slightly more than a living. Unlike the hapless Moore, he was adept at that which the Lord had him cut out to do, and it was a great relief for me to be able to help him at his trade, usually warm indoors, after the long years at Moore's and the monotony of toting his water and slopping his feverish, languishing pigs and alternately baking and freezing in his cornfield and his cotton patch. In fact, because of the circumstances of my new employment—which was to act as a general handyman around the wheel shop—I had a sense of well-being, physical at least, such as I had not felt

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since leaving Samuel Turner's nearly ten years before. Like most of the other property owners of the region, Travis was also a small farmer, with fifteen acres or so in corn, cotton, and hay, plus an apple grove whose principal function it was to produce cider and brandy. Since the relative success of the wheel shop, however, Travis had cut back on his farm holdings, leasing out his acreage to others, and retaining just the apple orchard, and a small produce garden and patch of cotton for his own use. Besides myself, Travis owned only two Negroes—a number, however, not unusual in its smallness, inasmuch as few white people in the region could any longer afford to support more than five or six slaves, and it was rare indeed to find a citizen prosperous enough to own as many as a dozen. Travis himself had recently owned seven or eight, not counting several unserviceable children, but as his acreage diminished and his solitary craft flourished, he had no need for this obstreperous pack, indeed found so many fat mouths to feed a burden on his capital, and thus, three years before, with great moral misgivings (or so I heard) sold off the whole lot—all but one—to a trader specializing in labor for the Savannah River plantations in Carolina. The one left was Hark, who was my age lacking a year. Born on a vast tobacco plantation in Pittsylvania County, he had been sold to Travis at the age of fifteen after the tobacco sucked the soil dry and the land went to wrack and ruin. I had known him for years and had come to love him like a brother. The other Negro, acquired subsequent to the Savannah sale, was Moses, a husky, tar-black, wild-eyed boy of twelve or thereabouts whom Travis, finding himself belatedly short-handed, had bought at the Richmond market several months before my arrival. He was strong and strapping for his age, and bright enough, I think; but he never quite got over the separation from his mammy; it left him bereft, stuporous, and he cried a lot and peed in his pants, sometimes even when he was at work, and all in all was a nuisance, becoming a great trial to Hark especially, who had a mother's soul in the body of a bull, and felt compelled to soothe and nurse the foundling.

This then was the population of our household at the time

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when I first encountered Jeremiah Cobb, almost one year to the day before he sentenced me to death: three Negroes—Hark, Moses, myself—and six white people—Mr. and Mrs. Travis and Putnam, Miss Maria Pope and two more besides. The last were the previously mentioned Joel Westbrook, fifteen years old, a budding wheelwright whom Travis had apprenticed to himself; and Travis' child by Miss Sarah, an infant boy of two months born with a purple blemish spreading across the center of his tiny face like the single shriveling petal of a blighted gentian. The white people, of course, lived in the main house, a modest, plain but comfortable two-storied structure of six rooms which Travis had built twenty years before. He had hewn the beams himself, planed the timbers, made it all weather-tight with pine gum and mortar, and had been wise enough to leave standing round it several enormous beech trees which offered shade from any angle against the summer sun. Adjacent to the house, separated from it only by the pig pen and a short path through the vegetable garden, was the wheel shop, converted from a onetime barn: here was the center of activity on the farm, here were the stores of oak and ashwood and iron, the forge and anvils, the bending frames, the modeling hammers and tongs and vises and the rows of chisels and punches and all the other equipment which Travis employed in his demanding craft. Doubtless at least in part because of my repute (decent albeit somewhat ambiguous and suspect in a way that I will soon explain) as a kind of harmless, runabout, comic nigger minister of the gospel, I was made custodian of the shop; in fact, prompted by Miss Sarah's avowal of my integrity, Travis gave into my keeping one of two sets of keys. I had plenty enough to do, but I cannot honestly say that my work here was toilsome; unlike Moore, Travis was no taskmaster, being by nature unable, I think, to drive his servants unreasonably and already having been well provided with willing help in the person of his stepson and the Westbrook boy, who was an eager apprentice if there ever was one.

Thus my duties, compared to what I had been used to, were light and fairly free of strain: I kept the place clean and added

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my shoulder to a job when extra strength was needed, such as bending a wheel rim, and frequently I spelled Hark as he pumped at the bellows of the forge, but generally speaking (and for the first time in years) the tasks I encountered were those calculated to tax not my muscles but my ingenuity. (For instance, the loft of the shop since its conversion from the status of a barn had still been infested by bats, tolerable enough when the place was the abode of cattle but an insufferable plague of drizzling bat shit to humans laboring daily below. Travis had tried half a dozen futile measures to rid himself of the pests, including fire and smoke, which nearly burned the place down; whereupon at this point I went out into the woods to a certain nest I knew of and plucked a blacksnake out of hibernation, wrenching it from the tail-end of its winter's sleep and installing it in the eaves. When spring came a week later the bats quickly vanished, and the blacksnake continued in friendly, satisfied residence, slithering benevolently around the circumference of the shop as it gobbled up rats and field mice, its presence earning me, I know, quiet admiration in Travis' regard.) So, all things being equal, from the beginning of my stay with Travis I was in as palmy and benign a state as I could remember in many years. Miss Maria's demands were annoying, but she was a small thorn. Instead of the nigger food I was accustomed to at Moore's, fat pork and corn pone, I got house food like the white people—a lot of lean bacon and red meat, occasionally even the leavings from a roast of beef, and often white bread made of wheat. And the lean-to shed adjoining the wheel shop where Hark and I shared housekeeping was roomy enough, with the first bed elevated above the ground that I had slept on since the old days with Samuel Turner; and I constructed, with my owner's blessing, an ingenious wooden vent leading through the wall from the forge, which was always banked with charcoal: the vent could be shut off in the summer, but in the winter its constant warmth made Hark and me (the poor boy Moses slept in the house, in a damp kitchen closet, where he could be available for errands night and day) as snug as two grubs beneath a log.

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Above all, I had quite a bit of time on my hands. I could fish and trap and do considerable scriptural reading. I had for going on to several years now considered the necessity of exterminating all the white people in Southampton and as far beyond as destiny carried me, and there was thus available to me more time than I had ever had before to ponder the Bible and its exhortations, and to think over the complexities of the bloody mission that was set out before me.

The particular November day I have mentioned is clear in my memory: an afternoon of low gray clouds scudding eastward on a gusty wind, cornfields brown and sere stretching toward the distant woods, and the kind of stillness which comes with that time of autumn, the buzz and hum of insects having flickered out, the songbirds flown south, leaving the fields and woods to dwell in a vast gray globe of silence; nothing stirs, minutes pass in utter quiet, then through the smoky light comes the sound of crows cawing over some far-off cornfield, a faint raucous hullabaloo which swiftly dwindles off in the distance, and silence again, broken only by the scratching and scrabble of dead windblown leaves. That afternoon I heard dogs yapping in the north, as if they were coming down the road. It was a Saturday, Travis and Joel Westbrook had driven that morning to Jerusalem on an errand, and only Putnam was at work in the shop. I was outside at the corner of my shed cleaning some rabbits from my trapline, when in the midst of this deep and brooding silence I heard the dogs yapping up the road. They were foxhounds, but not enough of them for a hunt, and I recall being puzzled, my puzzlement vanishing just as I rose and looked up the road and saw a whirlwind of dust: out of the whirlwind came a tall white man in a pale beaver hat and gray cloak, perched on the seat of a dogcart drawn by a frisky jet-black mare. Behind and below the seat were the dogs, three flop-eared hounds yapping at one of Travis' yellow cur dogs who was trying to get at them through the spokes of the wheels. It was, I think, the

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first time I ever saw a dogcart with dogs. From where I stood I saw the dogcart draw up to a halt in front of the house, then saw the man dismount; I thought he came down clumsily, seeming for an instant to falter or to stumble as if weak in the knees, but then, instantly regaining control of himself, he muttered something half-aloud and at the same time aimed a kick at the yellow dog, missed wildly, his booted foot fetching up against the side of the carriage with a clatter. It was comical to watch—a white man's discomfiture, observed on the sly, has always been a Negro's richest delight—but even as I felt the laughter gurgling up inside me the man turned and my laughter ceased. I was now able to observe him for the first time straight on: the face I beheld was one of the most unhappy faces I had ever seen. It was blighted, ravaged by sorrow, as if grief had laid actual hands on the face, wrenching and twisting it into an attitude of ineradicable pain. Now too I could see that the man was a little drunk. He stared somberly at the dog howling at him from the dust of the road, then raised his hollow eyes briefly to the gray clouds scudding across the heavens. I thought I heard a groan pass his lips; a spasm of coughing seized him. Then with an abrupt, clumsy gesture he drew the cloak about his gaunt and bony frame and proceeded with fumbling gloved hands to fasten the mare to the tethering post. Just then I heard Miss Sarah call from the porch. "Judge Cobb!" I heard her cry. "Sakes alive! What are you doin' down this way?" He shouted something back to her, the cadence of his words obscure, muffled against the gusty wind. The leaves whirled around him, all the dogs kept yapping and howling, the pretty little mare chafed and tossed her mane and stamped. I managed to make out the words: a hunt in Drewrysville, he was taking his dogs there, a grinding noise in the spindle box of his wheel. He thought the axle broke, split, something; being nearby he had come here for repairs. Was Mr. Joe to home? Downwind came Miss Sarah's voice from the porch, loud, buxom, cheerful: "Mr. Joe's done gone to Jerusalem! My boy Putnam's here, though! He'll fix that wheel for you, Judge Cobb, straightaway! Won't you come in and set a spell!" Thank you no, ma'am, Cobb hollered

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back; he was in a rush, he'd get that axle fixed and be on his way. "Well I 'spect you know where the cider press is," Miss Sarah called. "Right next to the shop. They's some brandy too! Just help yourself and drink your fill!"

I went back to the corner of the shed, attending to my rabbits, and paid no more mind to Cobb for the moment. Travis had allowed me to have the trapline, and in fact encouraged me in the enterprise since by arrangement he was to get two out of every three rabbits I caught. Such an agreement was satisfactory to me, inasmuch as this game was plentiful in the countryside and the two or three rabbits a week left for Hark and me were as much as we cared to eat, and more; nor did it matter to me that Travis sold most of the rabbits in Jerusalem and retained the money, which was clear profit, since if he was to earn interest on the capital which, body and brain, I represented anyway, I was glad to be capitalized upon in one small way which I myself took pleasure in. For after all of the dull drudgery at Moore's, it was the greatest delight to me to be able to make use of some actual indwelling talent, to fashion the traps myself—box traps which I made out of scrap pine from the shop, sawing and planing the wood with my own hands, carving the pegs and the notched pins which tripped the doors, and uniting one after another of the neat miniature coffins into a single smoothly-operating, silent, lethal assembly. But this was not all. As much as manufacturing the traps I enjoyed walking the trapline at daybreak in the silence of the countryside, when frost crackled on the ground and the hollows overflowed as if with milk in the morning mists. It was a three-mile hike through the woods along a familiar pine-needled path, and I devised a sort of cloth pouch to take along with me, in which I carried my Bible and my breakfast —two apples and a piece of streak-of-lean pork already cooked the night before. On my return, the Bible shared the pouch with a couple of rabbits, which I brained bloodlessly with a hickory club. A multitude of squirrels preceded me on these walks, in rippling stop-and-go motion; with some of them I became quite familiar and I bestowed names upon them, prophetic Hebrew names like Ezra and Amos, and I

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numbered them among God's blest since unlike rabbits they could not by nature be easily trapped and could not by law be shot (at least by me, Negroes being denied the use of guns). It was a silent, gentle, pristine time of day and as the sun shone pale through the dews and the mists and the woods hovered round me gray and still in the autumnal birdless quiet, it was like the morn of Genesis with the breath of creation fresh upon it.

Near the end of my trapline there was a little knoll, surrounded on three sides by a thicket of scrub oak trees, and here I would make my breakfast. From this knoll (though hardly taller than a small tree, it was the highest point of land for miles) I could obtain a clear and secret view of the countryside, including several of the farmhouses which it had already become my purpose eventually to invade and pillage. Thus these morning trapping expeditions also served to allow me to reconnoiter and to lay plans for the great event which I knew was in the offing. For at such times it seemed that the spirit of God hovered very close to me, advising me in this fashion: *Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord; Say, a sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter...* Of all the prophets it was Ezekiel with his divine fury to whom I felt closest by kinship, and as I sat there these mornings, the pork and apples devoured, the bag of brained cottontails at my side, I would for a long time ponder Ezekiel's words because it was through his words that the wishes of the Lord concerning my destiny (even more so than through the words of the other prophets) seemed most clearly to be revealed: *Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof... Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark...* Often as I brooded over these lines, I wondered why God should wish to spare the well-meaning and slay the helpless; nonetheless, it was His word. Great mornings, filled with hints, auguries, portents! I find it hard to describe the exaltation which seized me at such times when, crouched upon my secret knoll in gray

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momentous dawns, I saw in the unfolding future—fixed there as immutably as Saul or Gideon—myself, black as the blackest vengeance, the illimitable, devastating instrument of God's wrath. For on these mornings as I looked down upon the gray and somber and shriveling landscape it seemed as if His will and my mission could not be more plain and intelligible: to free my people I must one day only commence with the slumbering, mist-shrouded dwellings below, destroying all therein, then set forth eastward across the swamps and fields, where lay Jerusalem.

But to get back to Cobb, rather meanderingly I'm afraid, and again by way of Hark. Hark had a flair for the odd, the off-center: had he been able to read and write, been white, free, living in some Elysian time when he was anything but negotiable property worth six hundred dollars in a depressed market, he might have been a lawyer; to my disappointment, Christian teachings (my own mainly) had made only the shallowest imprint upon his spirit, so that being free of spiritual rules and restraints he responded to the mad side of life and could laugh with abandon, thrilling to each day's new absurdity. In short, he had a feeling for the crazy, the unexpected; all in all, this caused me mild envy. There was for instance the time when our shed behind the wheel shop was still uncompleted, and our master paid us a visit during a roaring thunderstorm, gazing skyward at the water cascading through the roof. "It's leaking in here," he said obviously, to which Hark replied: "Nawsuh, Marse Joe, hit leakin' outside. Hit *rainin'* in here." Likewise, it was Hark who gave expression to that certain inward sense—an essence of being which is almost impossible to put into words—that every Negro possesses when, dating from the age of twelve or ten or even earlier, he becomes aware that he is only merchandise, goods, in the eyes of all white people devoid of character or moral sense or soul. This feeling Hark called "black-assed," and it comes as close to summing up the numbness and dread which dwells in every Negro's heart as any word I have ever known. "Doan matter who dey is, Nat, good or bad, even ol' Marse Joe, dey white folks dey gone make you feel *black-assed.*

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Never seed a white man smile at me yet 'thout I didn't feel just about twice as black-assed as I was befo'! How come dat 'plies, Nat? Figger a white man treat you right you goin' feel *white-assed*. Naw *suh*! Young massah, old massah sweettalk me, I just feel *black-assed* th'ough an' th'ough. Figger when I gets to heaven like you says I is, de good Lord hisself even *He* goin' make ole Hark feel black-assed, standin' befo' de golden throne. Dere He is, white as snow, givin' me a lot of sweet talk and me feelin' like a *black-assed* angel. 'Cause pretty soon I know His line, yes *suh*! Yes *suh*, pretty soon I can hear Him holler out: 'Hark! You dere, boy! Need some spick and span roun' de throne room. Hop to, you *black-assed* scoundrel! Hop to wid de mop and de broom!'"

It is impossible to exaggerate the extent to which white people dominate the conversation of Negroes, and it is with certainty I can record that these were the words that Hark (who had come out of the shed to help me dress and clean the rabbits) had been speaking on this gray November day when, like the most vaguely discernible shadow, we felt simultaneously a presence at our crouched backs and again, half-startled, looked upward to see the distressed and ravaged face of Jeremiah Cobb. I don't know whether he overheard Hark's words, it would hardly have mattered if he had. Both Hark and I were taken unawares by the man's magisterial, sudden, lofty figure looming above us, swaying slightly against the smoky sky; so abruptly and silently had he come upon us that it was a long instant before the face of him actually registered, and before we were able to let slip from our hands the bloody rabbits and begin to move erect into that posture of respect or deference it is wise for any Negro to assume whenever a strange white man—always a bundle of obscure motives—enters upon the scene. But now even before we had gotten up, he spoke—"Go on," he said, "go on, go on," in a curiously rough and raspy voice—and with a motion of his hands he bade us to continue at our work, which we did, easing back slowly on our haunches yet still gazing up into the unsmiling, bleak, tormented face. Suddenly a hiccup escaped his lips, a sound incongruous and unseemly and even faintly comical

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emanating from that stern face, and there was a long moment of silence all around; he hiccuped again, and this time I was sure I sensed Hark's huge body beginning to shudder with—with what? Laughter? Embarrassment? Fear? But then Cobb said: "Boys, where's the press?"

"Yonder, massah," Hark said. He pointed to the shed several yards away, directly at the side of the shop, where the cider barrels lay in a moist and dusty rank in the shadows past the open door. "Red bar'l, massah. Dat's de bar'l fo' a gennleman, massah." When the desire to play the obsequious coon came over him, Hark's voice became so plump and sweet that it was downright unctuous. "Marse Joe, he save dat red bar'l for de *finest* gennlemens."

"Bother the cider," Cobb said, "where's the brandy?"

"Brandy in de bottles on de shelf," said Hark. He began to scramble to his feet. "I fix de brandy fo' you, massah."

But again Cobb motioned him back with a brisk wave of his hand. "Go on, go on," he said. The voice was not pleasant, neither was it unkindly; it had rather a distant, abstracted quality, yet somehow it remained tinged with pain as if the mind which controlled it struggled with a preoccupying disquiet. He was abrupt, aloof, but there was nothing one might call arrogant about him. Nonetheless, something about the man offended me, filled me with the sharpest displeasure, and it wasn't until he limped unsteadily past us through the crackling brown patch of weeds toward the cider press, saying not another word, that I realized that it wasn't the man himself who annoyed me so much as it was Hark's manner in his presence—the unspeakable bootlicking Sambo, all giggles and smirks and oily, sniveling servility. Hark had slit open a rabbit. The body was still warm (on Saturdays I often collected my game in the afternoon), and Hark was holding it aloft by the ears to catch the blood, which we saved to bind stews. I can recall my sudden fury as we crouched there, as I looked up at Hark, at the bland, serene, glistening black face with its wide brow and the brave, beautiful prominences of its cheekbones. With dumb absorption he was gazing at the stream of crimson blood flowing into the pan he held below. He had

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the face one might imagine to be the face of an African chieftain—soldierly, fearless, scary and resplendent in its bold symmetry—yet there was something wrong with the eyes, and the eyes, or at least the expression they often took on, as now, reduced the face to a kind of harmless, dull, malleable docility. They were the eyes of a child, trustful and dependent, soft doe's eyes mossed over with a kind of furtive, fearful glaze, and as I looked at them now—the womanish eyes in the massive, sovereign face mooning dumbly at the rabbit's blood—I was seized by rage. I heard Cobb fumbling around in the cider press, clinking and clattering. We were out of earshot. "Black toadeater," I said. "Snivelin' black toadeatin' white man's bootlickin' scum! You, Hark! Black *scum*!"

Hark's soft eyes rolled toward me, trusting yet fearful. "How come—" he began in an abrupt startled voice.

"Hush you face, man!" I said. I was furious. I wanted to let him have the back of my hand flush in the mouth. "Just hush, man!" I began to mimic him, hoarsely, beneath my breath. "'Red bar'l, massah! Dat's de bar'l wid de *gennleman's* cidah! I fix de brandy fo' you, massah!' How come you make with that kind of talk, bootlickin' nigger suckup? It was enough to make me plain ordinary *sick*!"

Hark's expression grew hurt, downcast; he moped disconsolately at the ground, saying nothing but moving his lips in a moist, muttering, abstracted way as if filled with hopeless self-recrimination. "Can't you see, miserable nigger?" I persisted, boring in hard. "Can't you see the *difference*? The difference betwixt plain politeness and bootlickin'? He didn't even say, 'Get me a drink.' He said just, 'Where the press?' A *question*, that's all. And there *you* is, already: scramblin' and scroungin' like a bitch pup, massah this and massah that! You enough to make a man chuck up his dinner!" *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.* Ashamed suddenly, I calmed myself. Hark was a vision of dejection. More gently I said: "You just got to *learn*, man. You got to learn the difference. I don't mean you got to risk a beatin'. I don't mean you got to be uppity and smart. But they is some kind of limit. And you ain't a *man* when you act like that. You

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ain't a man, you is a fool! And you do this all the time, over and over again, with Travis and Miss Maria and Lord help you even with them two *kids*. You don't learn nothin'. You a fool! *As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly*. You a *fool*, Hark. How'm I goin' to teach you?"

Hark made no reply, only crouched there muttering in his hurt and dejection. I was seldom angry at Hark but my anger when it came had the power to grieve him. Loving him as I did, I often reproved myself for my outbursts and for the misery they caused him but in certain ways he was like a splendid dog, a young, beautiful, heedless, spirited dog who had, nonetheless, to be trained to behave with dignity. Although I had not yet told him of my great plans, it was my purpose that when the day came to obliterate the white people, Hark would be my right arm, my sword and shield; for this he was well endowed, being quick-witted and resourceful and as strong as a bear. Yet the very sight of white skin cowed him, humbled him, diminished him to the most fawning and servile abasement; and I knew that before placing my ultimate trust in him I must somehow eliminate from his character this weakling trait which I had seen before in Negroes who, like Hark, had spent most of their early lives on big plantations. Certainly it would not do to have a chief lieutenant who was at heart only an abject nigger, full of cheap grins and comic shufflings, unable to gut a white man and gut him without a blink or qualm. In short, Hark was for me a necessary and crucial experiment. Though it is a painful fact that most Negroes are hopelessly docile, many of them are filled with fury, and the unctuous coating of flattery which surrounds and encases that fury is but a form of self-preservation. With Hark I knew I must strip away and destroy that repulsive outer guise, meanwhile encouraging him to nurture the murderous fury which lay beneath. Yet somehow I did not think it would take too much time.

"I doan know, Nat," Hark said finally. "I tries and tries. But hit seem I cain't git over dat black-assed feelin'. I tries, though." He paused, ruminating, nodding his head ever so slightly over the bloody carcass in his hands. "'Sides, dat man

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he look so sad and mou'nful. Never seed such a sad an' mou'nful man. Kind of felt sorry fo' de man. What you reckon make him so sad-lookin' anyways?"

I heard Cobb returning from the press through the weeds, unsteadily, stumbling slightly, with a brittle crackling sound of underbrush being trampled underfoot. "Feel sorry for a white man and you wastin' your sorrow," I said in a low voice. Then even as I spoke I made a sudden connection in my mind, remembering how a few months before I had overheard Travis speaking to Miss Sarah about this man Cobb, and the terrors which had beset him grisly and Joblike within the space of a single year: a merchant and banker of property and means, chief magistrate of the county, master of the Southampton Hounds, he lost his wife and two grown daughters to typhoid fever on the coast of Carolina, whither, ironically, he had sent his ladies to recuperate from winter attacks of the bronchial ailments to which all three were prone. Shortly afterward his stable, a brand-new structure on the outskirts of Jerusalem, burned to the ground in one horrid and almost instantaneous holocaust, incinerating all therein including two or three prize Morgan hunters and many valuable English saddles and harnesses, not to mention a young Negro groom. Subsequently the unfortunate man, having taken heavily to the bottle to ease his affliction, fell down some stairs and broke his leg; the limb failed to mend properly and, although ambulatory, he was plagued by a hectic, mild, irresistible fever and by unceasing pain. When I first heard of all this dreadful adversity I could not help but feel a spasm of satisfaction (do not consider me altogether heartless—I am not, as you shall surely see; but the contentment a Negro takes in a white man's misery, existing like a delicious tidbit among bleak and scanty rations, can hardly be overestimated), and I must confess that now as I heard Cobb behind me toiling back through the noisy weeds I experienced anew the same sense of gratification. (*For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came...*) A small thrill of pleasure coursed through my flesh.

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I thought he was going to walk past us to the shop or perhaps the house. Certainly I was taken by surprise when, instead, Cobb halted next to us with his boots practically atop one of the skinned rabbits. Again Hark and I started to rise, again he motioned for us to continue work. "Go on, go on," he repeated, taking a huge gulp from the bottle. I heard the brandy vanish with a frog-like croak in the back of his gullet, then the long aspirated gasp of breath, the final wet smacking of lips. "Ambrosia," he said. Above us the voice was self-confident, sturdy, stentorian; it had an unmistakable vigor and force, even though the tired undertone of sorrow remained, and I felt the residue of an emotion, ever so faint, which I must confess was only the fear I was born and brought up with. "*Am-ba-ro-sia*," he said. My fear receded. The yellow cur dog came snuffling up and I hurled into his face a slippery blue handful of rabbits' guts, which he made off with into the cotton patch, groaning with pleasure. "A Greek word," Cobb went on. "From *ambrotos*, that is to say, immortal. For surely the gods were conferring upon us poor humans a kind of immortality, no matter how brief and illusory, when they tendered us this voluptuous gift, made of the humble and omnipresent apple. Comforter to the lonely and outcast, an anodyne for pain, a shelter against the chill wind of remorseless, oncoming death—surely such an elixir must be touched by the hand of something or someone divine!" Another hiccup—it was like a species of shriek, really prodigious—racked his frame, and again I heard him take a swig from the bottle. Intent upon my rabbits, I had not as yet looked up, but I had caught a glimpse of Hark: transfixed, with bloody glistening hands outstretched, he was gazing open-mouthed at Cobb with a look of absolute attention, a kind of ignorant and paralyzed awe affecting to behold; straining to understand, he moved his lips silently in unison with Cobb's, chewing upon the gorgeous syllables as if upon air; droplets of sweat had burst forth from his black brow like a spray of quicksilver, and for an instant I could almost have sworn that he had ceased breathing. "Aaa-h," Cobb sighed, smacking his lips. "Pure delight. And is it not remarkable that to his already estimable en-

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dowments—the finest wheelwright in the Southside of Virginia—your master Mr. Joseph Travis should add another supreme talent, that of being the most skillful distiller of this ineffable potion within the span of a hundred miles? Do you not find that truly remarkable? Do you *not* now." He was silent. Then he said again, ambiguously, in a voice which seemed—to me at least—touched with threat: "Do you *not* now?"

I had begun to feel uncomfortable, disturbed. Perhaps I was oversensitive (as always) to the peculiar shading of a white man's tone; nonetheless, there seemed to be something pointed, oppressive, sardonic about this question, alarming me. It had been my usual experience that when a strange white man adopts this florid, familiar manner, and when his listener is black, the white man is out to have a little fun at the black man's expense. And such had been my developing mood of tension during the recent months that I felt I must avoid at all costs (and no matter how harmless the by-play) even the faintest premonition of a *situation*. Now the man's wretched question had deposited me squarely upon a dilemma. The trouble is: a Negro, in much the same way as a dog, has constantly to interpret the *tone* of what is being said. If, as was certainly possible, the question was merely drunken-rhetorical, then I could remain humbly and decently mute and scrape away at my rabbit. This (my mind all the while spinning and whirling away like a water mill) was the eventuality I preferred —dumb nigger silence, perhaps a little scratching of the old woolly skull, and an illiterate pink-lipped grin, reflecting total incomprehension of so many beautiful Latinisms. If on the other hand, as seemed more likely from the man's expectant silence, the question was drunken-surly-sarcastic and demanding of an answer, I would be forced to mutter the customary Yassuh—Nossuh being impermissible in view of the simple-minded nature of the question. What was so disturbing about this moment was my fear (and these fears, one may be assured, are neither vagrant nor inconsequential) that the Yassuh might very well be followed by something like this: "Ah, you do now. You *do* find it remarkable? Am I to understand then that you consider your master a dummox? That

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because he can make wheels he can't make brandy? You darkies don't have much regard for your owners these days, do you? Well, I want to tell you something, Pompey, or whatever your ludicrous name is, that...etc." The changes on this situation are endless, and do not think me overly cautious: motiveless nigger-needling is a common sport. But at this point it was not the possibility of humiliation I wanted to avoid so much as the possibility that, having recently vowed that humiliation would never again be a constraint upon me, or a repression, I would be forced to surmount it by beating the man's brains out, thus completely wrecking all my great designs for the future.

I had begun to shake, and I felt a stirring, a kind of watery weakness in my bowels; just then, however, came a fortunate distraction: nearby in the woods there arose the sound of a crashing in the undergrowth, and we all three turned to see a tawny mud-streaked wild sow lumber out of a thicket snorting and grunting, trailed by her squealing brood; now as quickly as they appeared pig and piglets seemed to dissolve back into the sere and withered forest, the space of sky above silent and gray and desolate with low-hanging, tattered, wind-driven clouds like smudged cotton, through which fai sunlight seeped yellowish and wan. Distracted, our eyes lingered on the scene for a moment, and then came a slamming noise, very close, as the door of the shop opened suddenly and, caught by the wind, hurled itself on screaming hinges backward against the wall. "Hark!" a voice called. It was my boy owner, Putnam. "Where you, Hark?" The child was in a foul mood; I could tell this from the blotches on his pale white face: they grew prominent and rosy whenever he became exercised or harassed. I should add that Putnam had more or less had it in for Hark, ever since the preceding year when, out hunting hickory nuts on a balmy afternoon, Hark had innocently but clumsily ambushed Putnam and Joel Westbrook in some tangled carnal union by the swimming pond, both of the boys naked as catfish on the muddy bank, writhing about and skylarking with each other in the most oblivious way. "Never seed such foolishness," Hark had said to me,

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"but 'twarn't like I was goin' to pay it no never mind. Nigger don't care 'bout no white boys' foolishness. Now dat daggone Putnam he so mad, you'd think it was *me* dat *dey* caught jackin' off de ole bird." I sympathized with Hark but in the end I couldn't take it too seriously, as it simply typified an uncorrectable condition: white people really see nothing of a Negro in his private activity, while a Negro, who must walk miles out of his path to avoid seeing everything white people do, has often to suffer for even the most guileless part of his ubiquitous presence by being called a spy and a snooping black scoundrel.

"Hark!" the boy called again. "Get in here straight away! What do you think you're doin' out there, you no-account nigger! Fire's gone plumb out! Get in here, God durn you lazy wretch!" The boy wore a leather apron; he had a coarse-featured, sullen, pouty-mouthed face with flowing dark hair and long side whiskers: as he shouted at Hark I felt a brief, fleeting spasm of rage and I longed for the day to arrive when I might get my hands on him. Hark scrambled to his feet and made off for the shop as Putnam called out again, this time to Cobb: "I think you have someways broke a axle, Judge, sir! My step-dad will fix it! He should be here afore too long!"

"Very well," Cobb called back. Then so abruptly that for an instant I thought he was still talking to the boy, he said: "'As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.' That of course is most familiar, but for the life of me I am unable to place it within the Scriptures. I suspect however that it is one of the Proverbs of King Solomon, whose delight it was to rail at fools, and to castigate human folly..." As he went on talking, a queasy sensation crept over me: the customary positions were reversed, the white man this time had caught the nigger at *his* gossip. How did I know that my own black blabbermouth would betray me, and that he would overhear every word I had said? Humiliated, ashamed of my humiliation, I let the sticky wet rabbit corpse fall from my fingers and braced my spirit, preparing for the worst. "Was it not Solomon who said the fool shall be the servant to the wise? Was it not he too who said a fool despiseth his father's

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instruction? And is not the instruction of the father, through Paul the Jew of Tarsus, manifest even to the fools of this great dominion, to wit: *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage*!" As he continued to speak I slowly stood erect, but even at my full height he towered over me, sickly, pale and sweating, his nose, leaking slightly in the cold, like a great scimitar protruding from the stormy and anguished face, the brandy bottle clutched in one huge mottled hand against his breast as he stood there in a limping posture, swaying and perspiring, speaking not so much to me as through and past me toward the scudding clouds. "Yes, and to this comes the reply, to this mighty and manifest truth we hear the response" —he paused for an instant, hiccuping, and then his voice rose in tones of mockery—"to this irresistible and binding edict we hear the Pharisee cry out of that great institution the College of William and Mary, out of Richmond, from the learned mountebanks abroad like locusts in the Commonwealth: 'Theology must answer theology. Speak you of liberty? Speak you of the yoke of bondage? How then, country magistrate, do you answer this? Ephesians Six, Five: *Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.* Or this, my hayseed colleague, how answer you to this? One Peter, Two, Eighteen: *Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward.* There, friend—*there*—is not that divine sanction for the bondage of which you rave and prattle?' Merciful God in heaven, will such casuistry never end! Is not the handwriting on the wall?" For the first time he seemed to look at me, fixing me for a moment with his feverish eyes before upending the bottle, thrusting its neck deep into his throat where the brandy gulped and gurgled. "*Howl ye*," he resumed, "*howl ye: for the day of the Lord is at hand: it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.* You're the preacher they call Nat, are you not? Tell me then, preacher, am I not right? Is not Isaiah only a witness to the truth when he says *howl ye*? When he says the day of the Lord is at

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hand, and it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty? Tell me in the honesty of truth, preacher: is not the handwriting on the wall for this beloved and foolish and tragic Old Dominion?"

"Praise God, mastah," I said, "that sure is true." My words were evasively meek and humble, with a touch of ministerial sanctimony, but I uttered them mainly to cover up my sudden alarm. For now I was truly alarmed that he had identified me; the fact that this strange and drunken white man knew who I was smote me like a blow between the eyes. A Negro's most cherished possession is the drab, neutral cloak of anonymity he can manage to gather around himself, allowing him to merge faceless and nameless with the common swarm: impudence and misbehavior are, for obvious reasons, unwise, but equally so is the display of an uncommon distinction, for if the former attributes can get you starved, whipped, chained, the latter may subject you to such curiosity and hostile suspicion as to ruinously impair the minute amount of freedom you possess. As for the rest, his words had spilled from his lips so rapidly and wildly that I was as yet unable to get the exact drift of his thought, which seemed nonetheless mighty precarious for a white man; and I still could not get over the sensation that he was trying to bait me, or lead me into some kind of trap. To conceal my dismay and confusion, again I mumbled, "That sure is true," and I chuckled idiotically, gazing toward the ground while I slowly wagged my head—as if to indicate that this poor darky understood precious little if indeed he understood anything.

But now, bending down slightly, his face drifted nearer to me, the skin close up not flushed and whiskey-pink as I had imagined but pale as lard, utterly bloodless and seeming to grow even whiter as I forced myself to return his gaze. "Don't play dumb with me," he said. There was no hostility in his voice, its sound was more request than command. "Your mistress pointed you out to me just now. Even so, I would have known, I could have distinguished between you two. The other Negro, what's his name?"

"Hark," I said. "That's Hark, mastah."

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"Yes, I would have known you. I would have known even had I not overheard you. 'Feel sorry for a white man and the sorrow is wasted.' Is that not what you said?"

A shiver of fear, old and habitual and humiliating, passed through me and despite myself I averted my eyes and blurted: "I'm sorry I said that, mastah. I'm dreadful sorry. I didn't mean it, mastah."

"Poppycock!" he exlaimed. "Sorry that you said you're *not* sorry for a white man? Come, come, preacher, you don't mean that. You don't mean that, do you?" He paused, waiting for an answer, but by now my distress and embarrassment had so unsettled me that I couldn't even force a reply. Worse, I had begun to despise and curse myself for my own slow-witted inability to deal with the situation. I stood there licking my lips as I gazed out toward the woods, feeling suddenly like the most squalid type of cornfield coon.

"Now don't play dumb with me," he repeated, the voice edged with a tone almost gentle, curiously ingratiating. "Your reputation precedes you, as it were. For several years now there has come to my attention wondrous bruit of a remarkable slave, owned at different times by various masters here in the vicinity of Cross Keys, who had so surpassed the paltry condition into which he had been cast by destiny that —*mirabile dictu*—he could swiftly read, if called upon to demonstrate, from a difficult and abstract work in natural philosphy, and in a fair hand inscribe page after page of random dictation, and had mastered his numbers as far as a comprehension of simple algebra, and had so attained an understanding of Holy Scripture that such of those few adepts in the science of divinity as had examined his knowledge of the Bible came away shaking their heads in wonder at the splendor of his erudition." He paused and belched. My eyes moved back again toward his, and I saw him wipe his mouth with his sleeve. "Rumor!" he resumed quickly. Now his voice had risen to a kind of impassioned runaway singsong, his eyes were wild and obsessed. "Astounding rumor to emerge from the backwoods of Old Virginny! Astounding as those rumors which in olden times came back from the depths of Asia—

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that at the source of the River Indus, I believe it was, dwelt a species of mammoth rat six feet long, which could dance a lively jig while accompanying itself on a tambourine, and when approached would sprout heretofore invisible wings and fly to the topmost branch of the nearest palm tree. Rumor almost impossible to entertain! For to believe that from this downtrodden race, the very laws governing which bind it to an ignorance more benighted and final than death, there could arise one single specimen capable of spelling *cat* is asking rational intelligence to believe that balmy King George the Third was not a dastardly tyrant or that the moon is made of clabber cheese!" He had begun to jab his finger at me as he spoke, a long bony finger with hairy joints, sending it forth into my face in quick thrusts like a snake's darting neck. "But beyond this, mind you, beyond this—to imagine this... this prodigy, this *paragon*, a Negro *slave*—oh perish the vile word! —who had acquired the lineaments not just of literacy but of knowledge, who it was rumored could almost speak in the accents of a white man of breeding and cultivation; who, in short, while still one of this doomed empire's most wretched minions, had transcended his sorry state and had become not a thing but a *person*—all this is beyond the realm of one's wildest imagination. No. No! The mind boggles, refuses to accept such a grotesque image! Tell me, preacher, how do you spell *cat*? Come now, prove to me the reality of this hoax, this canard!" He kept jabbing his finger at me, the voice cajoling, amiable, the eyes still wintry-wild and obsessed. The smell of applejack was around him like a sweet vapor. "Cat!" he said. "Spell *cat*. Cat!"

I had begun to feel surely that he was not being sarcastic, that he was somehow trying to express mad, hulking, terrifying feelings beyond anyone's surmise. I felt blood pounding at my temples and the cold sweat of fear and anxiety clammy beneath my arms. "Don't mock me, mastah, I pray you," I breathed in a whisper. "Kindly please, mastah. Don't mock me." Time crept past and we were both silent, gazing at each other, and the November wind boomed behind us in the forest, crashing like giant, diminishing footfalls across the

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graying waste of cedar and cypress and pine; for a moment my compliant lips trembled on a broken wisp of air, faltering—*Ca-*, *Ca-* and a grief-haunted sense of futility, childish, lifelong, nigger-black, welled up in me like a sigh of pain. I stood there sweating in the blustery wind, thinking: *So this is the way it is. Even when they care, even when they are somehow on your side they cannot help but taunt and torment you.* The palms of my hands slimy, and my mind roaring, thinking: *I do not want to, but now, now if he forces me to spell the word I will have to try to kill him.* I lowered my eyes again, saying more distinctly: "Don't mock me, mastah, please."

Yet now Cobb, adrift in his brandy haze, seemed to have forgotten what he had said to me and turned away, staring madly toward the forest where the wind still thrashed and flayed the distant treetops. He clutched the bottle as if with desperation at a lopsided angle against his chest, and a trickle of brandy oozed out against his cloak. With his other hand he began to massage his thigh, holding the leg so tightly that above the knuckles the flesh grew bone-white. "Almighty God," he groaned, "this everlasting mortal ache! *If a man live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.* God, God, my poor Virginia, blighted domain! The soil wrecked and ravaged on every hand, turned to useless dust by that abominable weed. Tobacco we cannot any longer raise, nor cotton ever, save for a meager crop in these few southern countries, nor oats nor barley nor wheat. A wasteland! A plump and virginal principality, a cornucopia of riches the like of which the world has never seen, transformed within the space of a century to a withering, defeated hag! And all to satisfy the demand of ten million Englishmen for a pipeful of bright Virginia leaf! Now even that is gone, and all we can raise is horses! Horses!" he cried as if to himself now, stroking and kneading his thigh. "Horses and what else, *what else*? Horses and pickaninnies! *Pickaninnies*! Little black infants by the score, the hundreds, the thousands, the tens of thousands! The fairest state of them all, this tranquil and beloved domain—what has it now become? A *nursery* for Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas. A mon-

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strous breeding farm to supply the sinew to gratify the maw of Eli Whitney's infernal machine, cursed be that blackguard's name! In such a way is our human decency brought down, when we pander all that is in us noble and just to the false god which goes by the vile name of *Capital*! Oh Virginia, woe betide thee! Woe, thrice woe, and ever damned in memory be the day when poor black men in chains first trod upon thy sacred strand!"

Groaning in pain now, fiercely stroking his thigh with one hand while with the other he elevated the bottle to his lips and drained it to the dregs, Cobb seemed, for once, oblivious of me, and I recall thinking that wisdom dictated my stealing out of his presence, if only I could find a decent way to do it. In scattered, disordered riot, all manner of emotions had run through me as he had spoken; not in years having heard a white man talk in this crazy fashion, I would not be honest if I did not admit that what he said (or the drunken gist of it, stealing in upon my consciousness like some unreal ghostly light) caused me to feel a shiver of awe and something else, dim and remote, which might have been a thrill of hope. But for some reason I cannot explain both awe and hope swiftly retreated in my mind, dwindled, died, and even as I looked at Cobb I could only smell the musky scent of danger—flagrant, imminent danger—and feel a sense of suspicion and mistrust such as I had rarely ever known. Why? It is perhaps impossible to explain save by God, who knows all things. Yet I will say this, without which you cannot understand the central madness of nigger existence: beat a nigger, starve him, leave him wallowing in his own shit, and he will be yours for life. Awe him by some unforeseen hint of philanthropy, tickle him with the idea of hope, and he will want to slice your throat.

Yet now before I could make any kind of move, a cracking noise sounded behind us as once again the shop door opened, swung wide, and drove itself with windy force against the wall. And as we turned then Hark emerged, shirttail flying,

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scrambling away from the shop, plunging in panicky headlong flight toward the fields and the woods beyond. Legs churning, his great black body moved at a furious gallop; his eyes rolled white with alarm. Scant yards behind him now came Putnam with his leather apron flapping as he brandished a stick of lightwood, bawling at the top of his voice. "You Hark, come back here! Come back here, you dad-dratted no-good an'mal! I'll get hold of you at last, black bastard!" Fleet as a deer, Hark scampered across the open lot, bare black feet sowing puffs of dust, the barnyard cat fleeing his approach, goose and gander too, cumbersomely flapping their flightless wings, emitting dismal honking sounds as they waddled from his path. Now on he came past us looking neither left nor right, eyes round and white as eggshells, and we could hear the voice panting *ah-ah-ah* as he sprinted for the woods, moving now with such nimble-footed speed that he seemed whisked forward like a sail on the wind. Far behind, losing ground each second, came the pimpled boy, still howling. "Stop! You Hark! Black wretch! Stop!" But Hark's great legs were churning as if propelled by steam; vaulting the pump trough, he soared through the air in a gigantic leap like something suspended by wire or wings, struck the earth with a thumping sound, and without breaking stride bounded on toward the distant forest, the inside of his bare soles flashing splendidly pink. Then all of a sudden it was as if he had been felled by a cannon ball: his head snapped back, and the rest of him including his pinwheeling legs sailed out and forward, and he came down flat on his back with a bladdery, sack-like thud, directly beneath the clothesline which, at gullet level, had intercepted his flight. But now as Cobb and I stood watching, watched him shake his head and try to rise up on his elbows, we saw now not one but two forces, though equally sinister and somber, converging on Hark from opposite directions: Putnam, still waving his lightwood stick, and Miss Maria Pope who had appeared as if from nowhere like some augury of frustrate bitchery and vengeance, bearing down upon him with a hobbled spinster's gait amid black snapping yards of funereal gingham. Blown back on the wind, her

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voice already was hysteric with shrill malevolence. "It's up the tree for you, nigger!" she screeched. "Up the tree!"

"Now," I heard Cobb murmur, "now we are about to witness a ritual diversion indigenous to this Southern clime. We are about to witness two human beings whipping another."

"No, mastah," I said. "Marse Joe don't 'low his niggers to be beaten. But there's ways around that, as you will surely see. You about to witness something else, mastah."

"Not a speck of charcoal in the shop!" Putnam was shouting, in a kind of wail.

"And not a drap of water in the kitchen pail!" Miss Maria shrilled. As if vying with each other to be the chiefest victim of Hark's enormity, they surrounded him, encompassed the prostrate form, squawking like birds. Hark staggered to his feet, shaking his head with the slow, stunned, dizzy bewilderment of an about-to-be-slaughtered ox which has received a faulty glancing blow. "It's up the tree with him this time, impudent black scoundrel!" Miss Maria cackled. "Putnam, get the ladder!"

"Hark's most dreadful feared of heights," I found myself explaining to Cobb. "This for him is worse than a hundred beatings."

"A fantastic specimen!" Cobb breathed. "A regular *gladiator*, a veritable black Apollo. And swift as a race horse! Where did your master get him?"

"From over Pittsylvania way," I said, "about fifteen years ago, mastah, when they broke up one of the old plantations." I paused for a moment, half-wondering to myself why I was proffering all this information. "Hark's all forlorn now," I went on, "heartsick and forlorn. On the outside he's very cheery, but inside he's just all torn up. He can't keep his mind on anything. That's how come he forgets his chores, and how come he gets punished. Poor old Hark..."

"Why is that, preacher?" said Cobb. Putnam had fetched a ladder now from the barn and we watched the procession as it made its way across the windswept lot, bleak and gray in the fading autumnal light—Miss Maria in the lead, grim, hands clenched, her back stiff and straight as a poker, Putnam

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behind with the ladder, and between them Hark in his dusty gray denim, shuffling along with his head bent in total dejection, looming over the two of them like some huge Goliath, a giant towering above a pair of vengeful, hurrying dwarfs. In Indian file, straight as an arrow, they made their way toward an ancient and enormous maple whose lowermost branch, leafless now, stretched across the pale sky like a naked arm twenty feet above the earth. I could hear Hark's bare feet scuffing across the ground, scuffing like the feet of a reluctant child. "Why is that?" Cobb said again.

"Well, mastah, I'll tell you," I said. "Couple years ago, afore I became Marse Joe's property, Marse Joe had to sell off most all of his niggers. Sell them off down to Savannah River, where you know they are planting considerable cotton. Hark told me Marse Joe was in a misery about this, but he just couldn't do anything else. Well amongst these niggers was Hark's wife and Hark's child—little boy about three or four years old he was then. Hark cared for that little boy almost more than anything."

"Yah, yah, yah," I could hear Cobb murmur, making little clucking sounds beneath his breath.

"So when that little boy was gone, Hark near about went mad with grief, couldn't think about anything else."

"Yah, yah, yah, yah."

"He wanted to run away and follow them all the way down to Savannah River, but I persuaded him not to. I showed him how futile and hopeless that would be. Besides, it's always been my idea that a nigger should follow all the rules and regulations so far as he was able."

"Yah, yah, yah."

"Anyway," I went on, "Hark ain't been quite right ever since then. You might say he's just been distracted. That's why he does things—or doesn't do things—that get him punished. And I'll be quite truthful with you, mastah, he *doesn't* do his chores, but I tell you he just can't help it."

"Yah, yah," Cobb muttered, "yah, great God, the logical outcome...*the ultimate horror*!" He had begun to hiccup again and the sound came forth in intermittent gasps, almost like

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sobs. He started to say something else, thought better of it, turned away, whispering over and over again: "*God, God, God, God, God.*"

"Now about this here," I explained. "Like I say, Hark's most dreadful feared of high places. Last spring the roof leaked and Marse Joe sent Hark and me up to fix it. But Hark got halfway up and he just froze there. Begun to whimper and mumble to hisself and wouldn't go an inch further. So I had to fix that roof myself. Anyway, Marse Putnam and Miss Maria caught ahold of this fear of Hark's—you might say they found out his weak spot. Like I said, Marse Joe won't tolerate anyone to mistreat his niggers, to beat them or anything like that. So whenever Marse Joe's away, and Marse Putnam and Miss Maria figger they can get away with it, why, they run old Hark up a tree."

Which is what they were doing even as I spoke, their voices muffled, remote, indistinct now on the blustery wind. Putnam propping the long ladder against the tree trunk, then jerking his arm furiously upward as he bade Hark to climb. And Hark began climbing, reluctantly, at the third rung turning his frightened face imploringly back as if to see whether they might not have had a change of heart, but this time Miss Maria's arms jerked upward—*up, nigger, up*—and again Hark continued his climb, knees quaking beneath his trousers. At last arrived at the lowermost branch, Hark swung himself off the ladder, clutching the tree so tightly that I could see even from this distance the veins standing out against the muscles of his arms, then with a sort of scrounging, sliding motion of his rump deposited himself in the crotch formed by trunk and branch, and sat there embracing the tree with his eyes squeezed shut—dizzy, windy yards above the earth. Then Putnam removed the ladder and laid it flat on the ground beneath the tree.

"Five, ten minutes will go by, mastah," I said to Cobb, "and then old Hark will commence crying and moaning. Just wait and see. Then pretty soon he'll start swaying. Crying and moaning and swaying there on that branch like he's about to fall off. Then Marse Putnam and Miss Maria'll set

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that ladder up against the tree and Hark'll climb down. I reckon they get scared Hark will fall off and break his neck, and they wouldn't want that to happen. No, they just want to give old Hark a poor time for a while."

"Yah, yah, yah," Cobb murmured, distantly now.

"And that for Hark is a poor time indeed," I said.

"Yah, yah, yah," he replied. I don't know whether he was listening to me or not. "Great God!" And his voice sank to whisper: "Great God! Sometimes I think...sometimes... *it is like living in a dream*!"

Then suddenly, without another word, Cobb was gone, limping in gaunt strides toward the house, the empty brandy flask still clutched in his hand, cloak flapping, shoulders hunched against the wind. I crouched down again above my rabbits, watching Cobb limp and sway across the lot and up to the front porch, his voice faint and weary as he called out: "Hallo, Miz Travis, think I'll come in and set a spell after all!" And Miss Sarah's voice way off within, high and full of cheer, and the sound of the door slamming as Cobb vanished inside the house. I stripped the white translucent inner skin from a rabbit, separating it from the pinkish flesh, and plunged the corpse into the cool water, feeling the guts squirming wet and slimy beneath my fingers. Blood mingled with the water, turning it a muddy crimson. Gusts of wind swept through the cotton patch, whistling; an army of dead withered leaves marched along the edge of the barn, rolled with a husky scrabbling noise across the vacant yard. I gazed down into the bloody water, thinking of Cobb. *Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof ...Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark...*

Suddenly I found myself thinking: *It is plain, yes plain, plain. When I succeed in my great mission, and Jerusalem is destroyed, this man Cobb will be among those few spared the sword...*

Across the roof of the woods the wind rushed in hissing, majestic swoop and cadence, echoing in far-off hollows with the thudding sound of footfalls. Gray and streaked, boiling,

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in ponderous haste, the clouds fled eastward across the lowering heavens, growing darker now in the early dusk. After a bit I heard Hark begin to moan, a soft disconsolate wordless wail, filled with dread. For long minutes he moaned, swaying high in his tree. Then I heard the *tap-tap-tapping* of the ladder as they set it against the tree trunk and let him down.

COLONIAL HOURS

The year of the hurricane
(we are speaking)
        bay roadway
        the drenching
leaves flattened to echo
dry velvet before
        hush

All quarrelsome
        of whether hibiscus
        shut

Tender magnificence

land in wake of Prospero

with splayed tendrils
        washed

        Now
Episcopal bells
        shudder
as when you placed water pails

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Think what justice the liberty bells
peal on moon base
in a peculiar climate
and rusting

Rhapsody of helmet
it also chants
a head burden to catch
sun granaries
legacies the sea strokes up
dried as weed cemetery
or blue ballooning stingarees
thrown

Night temples of palms
the rain blows *tropique*
as ceiling fans
you go in your orphan feet
crossing the tiles

You are two sinister people
in your oleander suit
your scorpion shoes
your eyeglasses ground from sand

You whisper it is so silent
under the mosquito net
remembering the prisons from which you sprang
the machinery of coral walls
your bamboo crest
the stockade that encircles you

as day the fresh water river
flowing from brow to throat
it cuts this salt thong
you are released
to the jointure of others

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an amulet that is a beetle

to be fed by palmetto and cane

cherished by the thrice blue seas

you shall reconnoiter

As a shell your dynasty

You are a porch with screens

You are a lucky person who hears
the wild the luxurious birds
their scream is like yours
when you fear the cold

they sing in the heat draughts
they sip from the fountain

joy in their male coloring is yours
and the neck reach

the colonial language
of tern sibilancy

Today you sit on the cropped grass
today looking at the map
you blink

Magnified world
my education
my craft

My fruit my oranges

—BARBARA GUEST

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"We're all right."

"Comfortably settled? Liking Chicago? Little Ephraim still in the Lab School?"

"Yes."

"And the Temple? I see that Val taped a program with Rabbi Itzkowitz—Hasidic Judaism, Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. He's very thick with these rabbis. Maybe he wants to swap wives with a rabbi. He'll work his way round from 'I and Thou' to 'Me and You'—'You and Me, Kid!' I suppose you wouldn't go along with everything."

Phoebe made no answer and remained standing.

"Maybe you think I'll leave sooner if you don't sit. Come, Phoebe, sit down. I promise you I haven't come to make scenes. I have only one purpose here, in addition to wanting to see an old friend. . . ."

"We're not really old friends."

"Not by calendar years. But we were so close out in Ludeyville. That is true. You have to think of duration—Bergsonian duration. We have known each other in duration. Some people are *sentenced* to certain relationships."

"You earned your own sentence, if that's how you want to think about it. We had a quiet life till you and Madeleine descended on Ludeyville and forced yourself on me." Phoebe, her face thin but hot, eyelids unmoving, sat down on the edge of the chair Herzog had drawn forward for her.

"Good. Sit back. Don't be afraid. I'm not looking for trouble. We've got a problem in common."

Phoebe denied this. She shook her head, with a stubborn look, all too vigorously. "I'm a plain woman. Valentine is from upstate New York."

"Just a rube. Yes. Knows nothing about fancy vices from the big city. Had to be led step by step into degeneracy by me—Moses E. Herzog."

Stiff and hesitant, she turned her body aside in her abrupt way; then her decision reached, turned just as abruptly to him again. "You never understood a thing about him. He fell for you. Adored you. Tried to become an intellectual because he wanted to help you—saw what a terrible thing you had done in giving up your respectable university position and how reckless you were, rushing out to the country with Madeleine. He thought she was ruining you and tried to set you on the right track again. He read all those books so you'd have somebody to talk to, out in the sticks, Moses. Because you needed help, praise, flattery, support, affection. It never was enough. You wore him out."

"Yes . . . ? What else? Go on," said Herzog.

"It's still not enough. What do you want from him now? What are you here for? More excitement? Are you still greedy for it?"

Herzog no longer smiled. "Some of what you say is right enough, Phoebe. I was certainly floundering in Ludeyville. But you take the wind out of me when you say you were leading a perfectly ordinary life up there in Barrington. Until Mady and I came along with the books and the theatrical glamor, high-level mental life, scattering big-shot ideas and whole ages of history. You were scared by us because we—Mady especially—gave him confidence. As long as he was only a small-time gimpy radio announcer, he might bluff at being a big shot; but you had him where you wanted him. Then he got bolder. He gave his exhibitionism scope. Quite right, I'm an idiot. You were even right to dislike me, if only because I wouldn't see anything and put another burden on

ELECTRONIC EDITION

The Art of Fiction XXXVII

Sketch by Rosalie Seidler

Saul Bellow

An Interview

The interview "took place" over a period of several weeks. Beginning with some exploratory discussions during May of 1965, it was shelved during the summer, and actually accomplished during September and October. Two recording sessions were held, totaling about an hour and a half, but this was only a small part of the effort Mr. Bellow gave to this interview. A series of meetings, for over five weeks, was devoted to the most careful revision of the original material. Recognizing at the outset the effort he would make for such an interview, he had real reluctance about beginning it at all. Once his decision had been reached, however, he gave a remarkable amount of his time freely to the task—up to two hours a day, at least twice and often three times a week throughout the entire five-week period. It had become an opportunity, as he put it, to say some things which were important but which weren't being said.

← *Final galley proof of* Herzog.

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Certain types of questions were ruled out in early discussions. Mr. Bellow was not interested in responding to criticisms of his work which he found trivial or stupid. He quoted the Jewish proverb that a fool can throw a stone into the water which ten wise men cannot recover. Nor did he wish to discuss what he considered his personal writing habits, whether he used a pen or typewriter, how hard he pressed on the page. For the artist to give such loving attention to his own shoelaces was dangerous, even immoral. Finally, there were certain questions that led into too "wide spaces" for this interview, subjects for fuller treatment on other occasions.

The two tapes were made in Bellow's University of Chicago office on the fifth floor of the Social Sciences Building. The office, though large, is fairly typical of those on the main quadrangles: much of it rather dark with one brightly lighted area, occupied by his desk, immediately before a set of three dormer windows; dark green metal bookcases line the walls, casually used as storage for a miscellany of books, magazines, and correspondence. A set of The Complete Works of Rudyard Kipling *("it was given to me") shares space with examination copies of new novels and with a few of Bellow's own books, including recent French and Italian translations of* Herzog. *A table, a couple of typing stands and various decrepit and mismatched chairs are scattered in apparently haphazard fashion throughout the room. A wall rack just inside the door holds his jaunty black felt hat and his walking cane. There is a general sense of disarray, with stacks of papers, books and letters lying everywhere. When one comes to the door, Bellow is frequently at his typing stand, rapidly pounding out on a portable machine responses to some of the many letters he gets daily. Occasionally a secretary enters and proceeds to type away on some project at the far end of the room.*

During the two sessions with the tape recorder, Bellow sat at his desk, between the eaves which project prominently into the room, backlighted by the dormer windows which let in the bright afternoon sun from the south. Four stories below lie 59th Street and Chicago's Midway, their automobile and human noises continually penetrating the office. As the questions were asked, Bellow listened carefully and often developed his answer slowly, pausing frequently to think out the exact phrasing he sought. His answers

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were serious, but full of his special quality of humor. He took obvious pleasure in the amusing turns of thought with which he often concluded an answer. Throughout, he was at great pains to make his ideas transparent to the interviewer, asking repeatedly if this was clear or if he should say more on the subject. His concentration during these sessions was intense enough to be tiring, and both tapes were brought to a close with his confessing to some exhaustion.

Following each taping session, a typescript of his remarks was prepared. Bellow worked over these typed sheets extensively with pen and ink, taking as many as three separate meetings to do a complete revision. Then another typescript was made, and the process started over. This work was done when the interviewer could be present, and again the changes were frequently tested on him. Generally these sessions occurred at Bellow's office or at his apartment, overlooking the Outer Drive and Lake Michigan. Once, however, revisions were made while sitting on a Jackson Park bench on a fine October afternoon, and one typescript was worked on along with beer and hamburgers at a local bar.

Revisions were of various sorts. Frequently there were slight changes in meaning: "That's what I really meant to say." Other alterations tightened up his language or were in the nature of stylistic improvements. Any sections which he judged to be excursions from the main topic were deleted. Most regretted by the interviewer were prunings that eliminated certain samples of the characteristic Bellow wit: in a few places he came to feel he was simply "exhibiting" himself, and these were scratched out. On the other hand, whenever he could substitute for conventional literary diction an unexpected colloquial turn of phrase—which often proved humorous in context —he did so.

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INTERVIEWER

Some critics have felt that your work falls within the tradition of American naturalism, possibly because of some things you've said about Dreiser. I was wondering if you saw yourself in a particular literary tradition?

BELLOW

Well, I think that the development of realism in the 19th century is still the major event of modern literature. Dreiser, a realist of course, had elements of genius. He was clumsy, cumbersome and in some respects a poor thinker. But he was rich in a kind of feeling which has been ruled off the grounds by many contemporary writers—the kind of feeling that every human being intuitively recognizes as primary. Dreiser has more open access to primary feelings than any American writer of the 20th century. It makes a good many people uncomfortable that his emotion has not found a more developed literary form. It's true his art may be too "natural." He sometimes conveys his understanding by masses of words, verbal approximations. He blunders, but generally in the direction of truth. The result is that we are moved in an unmediated way by his characters, as by life, and then we say that his novels are simply torn from the side of life, and therefore not novels. But we can't escape reading them. He somehow conveys, without much refinement, depths of feeling that we usually associate with Balzac or Shakespeare.

INTERVIEWER

This realism, then, is a particular kind of sensibility, rather than a technique?

BELLOW

Realism specializes in *apparently* unmediated experiences. What stirred Dreiser was simply the idea that you could bring unmediated feeling to the novel. He took it up naïvely without going to the trouble of mastering an art. We don't see this because he makes so many familiar "art" gestures, borrowed from the art-fashions of his day, and even from

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the slick magazines, but he is really a natural, a primitive. I have great respect for his simplicities and I think they are worth more than much that has been praised as high art in the American novel.

INTERVIEWER

Could you give me an example of what you mean?

BELLOW

In a book like *Jennie Gerhardt* the delicacy with which Jennie allows Lester Kane to pursue his conventional life while she herself lives unrecognized with her illegitimate daughter, the depth of her understanding, and the depth of her sympathy, and of her truthfulness impress me. She is not a sentimental figure. She has a natural sort of honor.

INTERVIEWER

Has recent American fiction pretty much followed this direction?

BELLOW

Well, among his heirs there are those who believe that clumsiness and truthfulness go together. But cumbersomeness does not necessarily imply a sincere heart. Most of the "Dreiserians" lack talent. On the other hand, people who put Dreiser down, adhering to a "high art" standard for the novel, miss the point.

INTERVIEWER

Aside from Dreiser, what other American writers do you find particularly of interest?

BELLOW

I like Hemingway, Faulkner and Fitzgerald. I think of Hemingway as a man who developed a significant manner as an artist, a life-style which is important. For his generation, his language created a life-style, one which pathetic old gentlemen are still found clinging to. I don't think of Hemingway as a great novelist. I like Fitzgerald's novels better,

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but I often feel about Fitzgerald that he couldn't distinguish between innocence and social climbing. I am thinking of *The Great Gatsby*.

INTERVIEWER

If we go outside American literature, you've mentioned that you read the 19th century Russian writers with a good deal of interest. Is there anything particular about them that attracts you?

BELLOW

Well, the Russians have an immediate charismatic appeal—excuse the Max Weberism. Their conventions allow them to express freely their feelings about nature and human beings. We have inherited a more restricted and imprisoning attitude toward the emotions. We have to work around puritanical and stoical restraints. We lack the Russian openness. Our path is narrower.

INTERVIEWER

In what other writers do you take special interest?

BELLOW

I have a special interest in Joyce; I have a special interest in Lawrence. I read certain poets over and over again. I can't say where they belong in my theoretical scheme; I only know that I have an attachment to them. Yeats is one such poet. Hart Crane is another. Hardy and Walter de la Mare. I don't know what these have in common—probably nothing. I know that I am drawn repeatedly to these men.

INTERVIEWER

It's been said that one can't like *both* Lawrence and Joyce, that one has to choose between them. You don't feel this way?

BELLOW

No. Because I really don't take Lawrence's sexual theories

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very seriously. I take his art seriously, not his doctrine. But he himself warned us repeatedly not to trust the artist. He said trust the work itself. So I have little use for the Lawrence who wrote *The Plumed Serpent* and great admiration for the Lawrence who wrote *The Lost Girl.*

INTERVIEWER

Does Lawrence at all share the special feeling you find attractive in Dreiser?

BELLOW

A certain openness to experience, yes. And a willingness to trust one's instinct, to follow it freely—that Lawrence has.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned before the interview that you would prefer not to talk about your early novels, that you feel you are a different person now from what you were then. I wonder if this is all you want to say, or if you can say something about how you have changed.

BELLOW

I think that when I wrote those early books I was timid. I still felt the incredible effrontery of announcing myself to the world (in part I mean the WASP world) as a writer and an artist. I had to touch a great many bases, demonstrate my abilities, pay my respects to formal requirements. In short, I was afraid to let myself go.

INTERVIEWER

When do you find a significant change occurring?

BELLOW

When I began to write *Augie March.* I took off many of these restraints. I think I took off too many, and went too far, but I was feeling the excitement of discovery. I had just increased my freedom, and like any emancipated plebeian I abused it at once.

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INTERVIEWER

What were these restraints that you took off in *Augie March*?

BELLOW

My first two books are well-made. I wrote the first quickly but took great pains with it. I labored with the second and tried to make it letter-perfect. In writing *The Victim* I accepted a Flaubertian standard. Not a bad standard, to be sure, but one which, in the end, I found repressive—repressive because of the circumstances of my life and because of my upbringing in Chicago as the son of immigrants. I could not, with such an instrument as I developed in the first two books, express a variety of things I knew intimately. Those books, though useful, did not give me a form in which I felt comfortable. A writer should be able to express himself easily, naturally, copiously in a form which frees his mind, his energies. Why should he hobble himself with formalities? With a borrowed sensibility? With the desire to be "correct"? Why should I force myself to write like an Englishman or a contributor to the *New Yorker?* I soon saw that it was simply not in me to be a mandarin. I should add that for a young man in my position there were social inhibitions, too. I had good reason to fear that I would be put down as a foreigner, an interloper. It was made clear to me when I studied literature in the university that as a Jew and the son of Russian Jews I would probably never have the right *feeling* for Anglo-Saxon traditions, for English words. I realized even in college that the people who told me this were not necessarily disinterested friends. But they had an effect on me, nevertheless. This was something from which I had to free myself. I fought free because I had to.

INTERVIEWER

Are these social inhibitors as powerful today as they were when you wrote *Dangling Man*?

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BELLOW

I think I was lucky to have grown up in the Middle West where such influences are less strong. If I'd grown up in the East and attended an Ivy-League university, I might have been damaged more badly. Puritan and Protestant America carries less weight in Illinois than in Massachusetts. But I don't bother much with such things now.

INTERVIEWER

Did another change in your writing occur between *Augie March* and *Herzog*? You've mentioned writing *Augie March* with a great sense of freedom, but I take it that *Herzog* was a very difficult book to write.

BELLOW

It was. I had to tame and restrain the style I developed in *Augie March* in order to write *Henderson* and *Herzog*. I think both those books reflect that change in style. I wouldn't really know how to describe it. I don't care to trouble my mind to find an exact description for it, but it has something to do with a kind of readiness to record impressions arising from a source of which we know little. I suppose that all of us have a primitive prompter or commentator within who from earliest years has been advising us, telling us what the real world is. There is such a commentator in me. I have to prepare the ground for him. From this source come words, phrases, syllables; sometimes only sounds, which I try to interpret, sometimes whole paragraphs, fully punctuated. When E. M. Forster said, "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" he was perhaps referring to his own prompter. There is that observing instrument in us—in childhood at any rate. At the sight of a man's face, his shoes, the color of light, a woman's mouth or perhaps her ear, one receives a word, a phrase, at times nothing but a nonsense-syllable from the primitive commentator.

INTERVIEWER

So this change in your writing—

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BELLOW

Was an attempt to get nearer to that primitive commentator.

INTERVIEWER

How do you go about getting nearer to him, preparing the way for him?

BELLOW

When I say the commentator is primitive, I don't mean that he's crude; God knows he's often fastidious. But he won't talk until the situation's right. And if you prepare the ground for him with too many difficulties underfoot, he won't say anything. I must be terribly given to fraud and deceit because I sometimes have great difficulty preparing a suitable ground. This is why I've had so much trouble with my last two novels. I appealed directly to my prompter. The prompter, however, has to find the occasion perfect—that is to say, truthful, and necessary. If there is any superfluity or inner falsehood in the preparations he is aware of it. I have to stop. Often I have to begin again, with the first word. I can't remember how many times I wrote *Herzog*. But at last I did find the acceptable ground for it.

INTERVIEWER

Do these preparations include your coming to some general conception of the work?

BELLOW

Well, I don't know exactly how it's done. I let it alone a good deal. I try to avoid common forms of strain and distortion. For a long time, perhaps from the middle of the 19th century, writers have not been satisfied to regard themselves simply as writers. They have required also a theoretical framework. Most often they have been their own theoreticians, have created their own ground as artists, and have provided an exegesis for their own works. They have found it necessary to take a position, not merely to write novels.

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In bed last night I was reading a collection of articles by Stendhal. One of them amused me very much, touched me. Stendhal was saying how lucky writers were in the age of Louis XIV not to have anyone take them very seriously. Their obscurity was very valuable. Corneille had been dead for several days before anyone at court considered the fact important enough to mention. In the 19th century, says Stendhal, there would have been several public orations, Corneille's funeral covered by all the papers. There are great advantages in not being taken *too* seriously. Some writers are excessively serious about themselves. They accept the ideas of the "cultivated public." There is such a thing as over-capitalizing the A in Artist. Certain writers and musicians understand this. Stravinsky says the composer should practice his trade exactly as a shoemaker does. Mozart and Haydn accepted commissions—wrote to order. In the 19th century, the artist loftily waited for Inspiration. Once you elevate yourself to the rank of a cultural institution, you're in for a lot of trouble.

Then there is a minor modern disorder—the disease of people who live by an image of themselves created by papers, television, Broadway, Sardi's, gossip, or the public need for celebrities. Even buffoons, prize fighters and movie stars have caught the bug. I avoid these "images." I have a longing, not for downright obscurity—I'm too egotistical for that—but for peace, and freedom from meddling.

INTERVIEWER

In line with this, the enthusiastic response to *Herzog* must have affected your life considerably. Do you have any thoughts as to why this book became and remained the best-seller it did?

BELLOW

I don't like to agree with the going view that if you write a best-seller it's because you betrayed an important principle or sold your soul. I know that sophisticated opinion believes this. And although I don't take much stock in sophisticated

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opinion, I have examined my conscience. I've tried to find out whether I had unwittingly done wrong. But I haven't yet discovered the sin. I do think that a book like *Herzog*, which ought to have been an obscure book with a total sale of 8000, has such a reception because it appeals to the unconscious sympathies of many people. I know from the mail I've received that the book described a common predicament. *Herzog* appealed to Jewish readers, to those who have been divorced, to those who talk to themselves, to college graduates, readers of paperbacks, autodidacts, to those who yet hope to live awhile, etc.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel there were deliberate attempts at lionizing by the literary tastemakers? I was thinking that the recent deaths of Faulkner and Hemingway have been seen as creating a vacuum in American letters, which we all know is abhorrent.

BELLOW

Well, I don't know whether I would say a vacuum. Perhaps a pigeonhole. I agree that there is a need to keep the pigeonholes filled and that people are uneasy when there are vacancies. Also the mass media demand material—grist—and literary journalists have to create a major league atmosphere in literature. The writers don't offer to fill the pigeonholes. It's the critics who want figures in the Pantheon. But there are many people who assume that every writer must be bucking for the niche. Why should writers wish to be rated—seeded—like tennis players? Handicapped like racehorses? What an epitaph for a novelist: "He won all the polls."!

INTERVIEWER

How much are you conscious of the reader when you write? Is there an ideal audience that you write for?

BELLOW

I have in mind another human being who will understand me. I count on this. Not on perfect understanding, which is

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Cartesian, but on approximate understanding, which is Jewish. And on a meeting of sympathies, which is human. But I have no ideal reader in my head, no. Let me say just this, too. I seem to have the blind self-acceptance of the eccentric who can't conceive that his eccentricities are not clearly understood.

INTERVIEWER

So there isn't a great deal of calculation about rhetoric?

BELLOW

These are things that can't really be contrived. People who talk about contrivance must think that a novelist is a man capable of building a skyscraper to conceal a dead mouse. Skyscrapers are not raised simply to conceal mice.

INTERVIEWER

It's been said that contemporary fiction sees man as a victim. You gave this title to one of your early novels, yet there seems to be very strong opposition in your fiction to seeing man as simply determined or futile. Do you see any truth to this claim about contemporary fiction?

BELLOW

Oh, I think that realistic literature from the first has been a victim literature. Pit any ordinary individual—and realistic literature concerns itself with ordinary individuals—against the external world and the external world will conquer him, of course. Everything that people believed in the 19th century about determinism, about man's place in nature, about the power of productive forces in society, made it inevitable that the hero of the realistic novel should not be a hero but a sufferer who is eventually overcome. So I was doing nothing very original by writing another realistic novel about a common man and calling it *The Victim*. I suppose I was discovering independently the essence of much of modern realism. In my innocence, I put my finger on it. Serious realism also contrasts the common man with aristocratic greatness. He is

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overborne by fate, just as the great are in Shakespeare or Sophocles. But this contrast, inherent in literary tradition, always damages him. In the end the force of tradition carries realism into parody, satire, mock-epic—Leopold Bloom.

INTERVIEWER

Haven't you yourself moved away from the suggestion of plebeian tragedy toward a treatment of the sufferer that has greater comic elements? Although the concerns and difficulties are still fundamentally serious, the comic elements in *Henderson*, in *Herzog*, even in *Seize the Day* seem much more prominent than in *Dangling Man* or *The Victim*.

BELLOW

Yes, because I got very tired of the solemnity of complaint, altogether impatient with complaint. Obliged to choose between complaint and comedy, I choose comedy, as more energetic, wiser and manlier. This is really one reason why I dislike my own early novels. I find them plaintive, sometime querulous. *Herzog* makes comic use of complaint.

INTERVIEWER

When you say that you are obliged to choose between complaint and comedy, does it mean this is the only choice—that you are limited to choosing between just these two alternatives?

BELLOW

I'm not inclined to predict what will happen. I may feel drawn to comedy again, I may not. But modern literature was dominated by a tone of elegy from the twenties to the fifties, the atmosphere of Eliot in "The Waste Land" and that of Joyce in the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Sensibility absorbed this sadness, this view of the artist as the only contemporary link with an age of gold, forced to watch the sewage flowing in the Thames, every aspect of modern civilization doing violence to his (artist-patrician) feelings. This

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went much farther than it should have been allowed to go. It descended to absurdities, of which I think we have had enough.

INTERVIEWER

I wonder if you could say something about how important the environments are in your works. I take it that for the realist tradition the context in which the action occurs is of vital importance. You set your novels in Chicago, New York, as far away as Africa. How important are these settings for the fiction?

BELLOW

Well, you present me with a problem to which I think no one has the answer. People write realistically but at the same time they want to create environments which are somehow desirable, which are surrounded by atmospheres in which behavior becomes significant, which display the charm of life. What is literature without these things? Dickens's London is gloomy, but also cozy. And yet realism has always offered to annihilate precisely such qualities. That is to say, if you want to be ultimately realistic you bring artistic space itself in danger. In Dickens, there is no void beyond the fog. The environment is human, at all times. Do you follow me?

INTERVIEWER

I'm not sure I do.

BELLOW

The realistic tendency is to challenge the human significance of things. The more realistic you are the more you threaten the grounds of your own art. Realism has always both accepted and rejected the circumstances of ordinary life. It accepted the task of writing about ordinary life and tried to meet it in some extraordinary fashion. As Flaubert did. The subject might be common, low, degrading; all this was to be redeemed by art. I really do see those Chicago environments as I represent them. They suggest their own style of presentation. I elaborate it.

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INTERVIEWER

Then you aren't especially disturbed by readers of *Henderson*, for example, who say that Africa really isn't like that? One sort of realist would require a writer to spend several years on location before daring to place his characters there. You're not troubled by him, I take it?

BELLOW

Perhaps you should say "factualist" rather than "realist." Years ago, I studied African ethnography with the late Professor Herskovits. Later he scolded me for writing a book like *Henderson*. He said the subject was much too serious for such fooling. I felt that my fooling was fairly serious. Literalism, factualism, will smother the imagination altogether.

INTERVIEWER

You have on occasion divided recent American fiction into what you call the "cleans" and the "dirties." The former, I gather, tend to be conservative and easily optimistic, the latter the eternal nay-sayers, rebels, iconoclasts. Do you feel this is still pretty much the picture of American fiction today?

BELLOW

I feel that both choices are rudimentary and pitiful, and though I know the uselessness of advocating any given path to other novelists, I am still inclined to say, Leave both these extremes. They are useless, childish. No wonder the really powerful men in our society, whether politicians or scientists, hold writers and poets in contempt. They do it because they get no evidence from modern literature that anybody is thinking about any significant question. What does the radicalism of radical writers nowadays amount to? Most of it is hand-me-down bohemianism, sentimental populism, D. H. Lawrence-and-water, or imitation Sartre. For American writers radicalism is a question of honor. They must be radicals for the sake of their dignity. They see it as their function, and a noble function, to say Nay, and to bite not only the hand that feeds them (and feeds them with comic abundance, I

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might add) but almost any other hand held out to them. Their radicalism, however, is contentless. A genuine radicalism, which truly challenges authority, we need desperately. But a radicalism of posture is easy and banal. Radical criticism requires knowledge, not posture, not slogans, not rant. People who maintain their dignity as artists, in a small way, by being mischievous on television, simply delight the networks and the public. True radicalism requires homework—thought. Of the cleans, on the other hand, there isn't much to say. They seem faded.

INTERVIEWER

Your context is essentially that of the modern city, isn't it? Is there a reason for this beyond the fact that you come out of an urban experience?

BELLOW

Well, I don't know how I could possibly separate my knowledge of life, such as it is, from the city. I could no more tell you how deeply it's gotten into my bones than the lady who paints radium dials in the clock factory can tell you.

INTERVIEWER

You've mentioned the distractive character of modern life. Would this be most intense in the city?

BELLOW

The volume of judgments one is called upon to make depends upon the receptivity of the observer, and if one is very receptive, one has a terrifying number of opinions to render —"What do you think about this, about that, about Vietnam, about city planning, about expressways, or garbage disposal, or democracy or Plato, or Pop Art, or welfare states, or literacy in a 'mass society'?" I wonder whether there will ever be enough tranquility under modern circumstances to allow our contemporary Wordsworth to recollect anything. I feel that art has something to do with the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos. A stillness which characterizes prayer,

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too, and the eye of the storm. I think that art has something to do with an arrest of attention in the midst of distraction.

INTERVIEWER

I believe you once said that it is the novel which must deal particularly with this kind of chaos, and that as a consequence certain forms appropriate to poetry or to music are not available to the novelist.

BELLOW

I'm no longer so sure of that. I think the novelist can avail himself of similar privileges. It's just that he can't act with the same purity or economy of means as the poet. He has to traverse a very muddy and noisy territory, before he can arrive at a pure conclusion. He's more exposed to the details of life.

INTERVIEWER

Is there anything peculiar about the *kind* of distractions you see the novelist having to confront today? Is it just that there are more details or is their quality different today from what it used to be?

BELLOW

The modern masterpiece of confusion is Joyce's *Ulysses*. There the mind is unable to resist experience. Experience in all its diversity, its pleasure and horror, passes through Bloom's head like an ocean through a sponge. The sponge can't resist; it has to accept whatever the waters bring. It also notes every microörganism that passes through it. This is what I mean. How much of this must the spirit suffer, in what detail is it obliged to receive this ocean with its human plankton? Sometimes it looks as if the power of the mind has been nullified by the volume of experiences. But of course this is assuming the degree of passivity that Joyce assumes in *Ulysses*. Stronger, more purposeful minds can demand order, impose order, select, disregard, but there is still the threat of disintegration under the particulars. A Faustian artist is unwilling to surrender to the mass of particulars.

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INTERVIEWER

Some people have felt your protagonists are seeking the answer to a question that might be phrased, How is it possible today for a good man to live? I wonder if you feel there is any single recurring question like this in the novels?

BELLOW

I don't think that I've represented any really good men; no one is thoroughly admirable in any of my novels. Realism has restrained me too much for that. I should *like* to represent good men. I long to know who and what they are and what their condition might be. I often represent men who desire such qualities but seem unable to achieve them on any significant scale. I criticize this in myself. I find it a limitation.

INTERVIEWER

I'm sorry; what exactly is this limitation?

BELLOW

The fact that I have not discerned those qualities or that I have not shown them in action. Herzog wants very much to have effective virtues. But that's a source of comedy in the book. I think I am far more concerned with another matter, and I don't approach this as a problem with a ready answer. I see it rather as a piece of research, having to do with human characteristics or qualities which have no need of justification. It's an odd thing to do, it shouldn't be necessary to "justify" certain things. But there are many skeptical, rebellious or simply nervous writers all around us, who, having existed a full 20 or 30 years in this universe, denounce or reject life because it fails to meet their standards as philosophical intellectuals. It seems to me that they can't know enough about it for confident denial. The mystery is too great. So when they knock at the door of mystery with the knuckles of cognition it is quite right that the door should open and some mysterious power should squirt them in the eye. I think a good deal of *Herzog* can be explained simply by the implicit assumption that existence, quite apart from any of our judg-

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ments, has value, that existence is worth-ful. Here it is possible, however, that the desire to go on with his creaturely career vulgarly betrays Herzog. He wants to live? What of it! The clay that frames him contains this common want. Simple *aviditas vitae*. Does a man deserve any credit for this?

INTERVIEWER

Would this help to explain, then, why many of the difficulties which Herzog's mind throws up for him throughout the novel don't ever seem to be *intellectually* resolved?

BELLOW

The book is not anti-intellectual, as some have said. It simply points to the comic impossibility of arriving at a synthesis that can satisfy modern demands. That is to say, full awareness of all major problems, together with the necessary knowledge of history, of science and philosophy. That's why Herzog paraphrases Thomas Marshall, Woodrow Wilson's Vice-President, who said what this country needs is a good five-cent cigar. (I think it was Bugs Baer who said it first.) Herzog's version: what this country needs is a good five-cent synthesis.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find many contemporary writers attempting to develop such syntheses or insisting that significant fiction provide them?

BELLOW

Well, I don't know that too many American novelists, young or old, are tormenting their minds with these problems. Europeans do. I don't know that they can ever reach satisfactory results on the grounds they have chosen. At any rate, they write few good novels. But that leads us into some very wide spaces.

INTERVIEWER

Do the ideas in *Herzog* have any other major roles to play?

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The "anti-intellectual" charge seems to come from people who don't feel the ideas are essential either in motivating the action, the decisions Herzog makes, or in helping him to come through at the end.

BELLOW

To begin with, I suppose I should say something about the difference between the role ideas play in American literature. European literature—I speak now of the continent—is intellectual in a different sense from ours. The intellectual hero of a French or a German novel is likely to be a philosophical intellectual, an ideological intellectual. We here, intellectuals —or the educated public—know that in our liberal democracy ideas become effective within an entirely different tradition. The lines are less clearly drawn. We do not expect thought to have results, say in the moral sphere, or in the political, in quite the way a Frenchman would. To be an intellectual in the United States sometimes means to be immured in a private life in which one thinks, but thinks with some humiliating sense of how little thought can accomplish. To call therefore for a dramatic resolution in terms of ideas in an American novel is to demand something for which there is scarcely any precedent. My novel deals with the humiliating sense that results from the American mixture of private concerns and intellectual interests. This is something which most readers of the book seem utterly to have missed. Some, fortunately, have caught it. But in part *Herzog* is intended to bring to an end, under blinding light, a certain course of development. Many people feel a "private life" to be an affliction. In some sense it is a genuine affliction; it cuts one off from a common life. To me, a significant theme of *Herzog* is the imprisonment of the individual in a shameful and impotent privacy. He feels humiliated by it; he struggles comically with it; and he comes to realize at last that what he considered his intellectual "privilege" has proved to be another form of bondage. Anyone who misses this misses the point of the book. So that to say that Herzog is not motivated in his acts by ideas is entirely false. Any *Bildungsroman*—and

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Herzog is, to use that heavy German term, a *Bildungsroman*—concludes with the first step. The first *real* step. Any man who has rid himself of superfluous ideas in order to take that first step has done something significant. When people complain of a lack of ideas in novels, they may mean that they do not find familiar ideas, fashionable ideas. Ideas outside the "canon," they don't recognize. So, if what they mean is ideas à la Sartre or ideas à la Camus, they are quite right: there are few such in *Herzog*. Perhaps they mean that the thoughts of a man fighting for sanity and life are not suitable for framing.

INTERVIEWER

Herzog rejects certain of these fashionable ideas, doesn't he—the ideas à la Sartre or à la Camus?

BELLOW

I think he tests them first upon his own sense of life and against his own desperate need for clarity. With him these thoughts are not a game. Though he may laugh as he thinks them, his survival depends upon them. I didn't have him engage in full combat with figures like Sartre. If he had chosen to debate with Sartre in typical Herzogian fashion he would perhaps have begun with Sartre's proposition that Jews exist only because of anti-semitism, that the Jew has to choose between authentic and inauthentic existence, that authentic existence can never be detached from this anti-semitism which determines it. Herzog might have remembered that for Sartre, the Jew exists because he is hated, not because he has a history, not because he has origins of his own—but simply because he is designated, created, in his Jewishness by an outrageous evil. Sartre offers a remedy for those Jews who are prepared to make the authentic choice: he extends to them the invitation to become Frenchmen. If this great prince of contemporary European philosophy offers Herzog ideas such as this to embrace (or dispute), who can blame him for his skepticism towards what is called, so respectfully, Thought, towards contemporary intellectual fare? Often Herzog deals with ideas in negative fashion. He needs to dismiss a great

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mass of irrelevancy and nonsense in order to survive. Perhaps this was what I meant earlier when I said that we were called upon to make innumerable judgments. We can be consumed simply by the necessity to discriminate between multitudes of propositions. We have to dismiss a great number of thoughts if we are to have any creaturely or human life at all. It seems at times that we are on trial seven days a week answering the questions, giving a clear account of ourselves. But when does one live? How does one live if it is necessary to render ceaseless judgments?

INTERVIEWER

Herzog's rejection of certain ideas has been widely recognized, but—

BELLOW

Why he rejects them is not at all clear. Herzog's skepticism toward ideas is very deep. Though Jews are often accused of being "rootless" rationalists, a man like Herzog knows very well that habit, custom, tendency, temperament, inheritance, and the power to recognize real and human facts have equal weight with ideas.

INTERVIEWER

You've spoken also of the disabling effects of basing a novel on ideas. Does this mean structuring a novel according to a philosophical conception?

BELLOW

No, I have no objection to that, nor do I have any objection to basing novels on philosophical conceptions or anything else that works. But let us look at one of the dominant ideas of the century, accepted by many modern artists—the idea that humankind has reached a terminal point. We find this terminal assumption in writers like Joyce, Céline, Thomas Mann. In *Doktor Faustus* politics and art are joined in the destruction of civilization. Now here is an idea, found in some of the greatest novelists of the 20th century. How good is this

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idea? Frightful things have happened, but is the apocalyptic interpretation true? The terminations did not fully terminate. Civilization is still here. The prophecies have not been borne out. Novelists are wrong to put an interpretation of history at the base of artistic creation—to speak "the last word." It is better that the novelist should trust his own sense of life. Less ambitious. More likely to tell the truth.

INTERVIEWER

Frequently in your fiction the hero strives to avoid being swallowed up by other people's ideas or versions of reality. On occasion you seem to present him with something like the whole range of contemporary alternatives—say, in *Augie March* or *Herzog*. Was this one of your intentions?

BELLOW

All these matters are really so complicated. Of course these books are somewhat concerned with free choice. I don't think that they pose the question successfully—the terms are not broad enough. I think I have let myself off easily. I seem to have asked in my books, How can one resist the controls of this vast society *without* turning into a nihilist, avoiding the absurdity of empty rebellion. I have asked, Are there other, more goodnatured forms of resistance and free choice? And I suppose that, like most Americans, I have involuntarily favored the more comforting or melioristic side of the question. I don't mean that I ought to have been more "pessimistic" because I have found "pessimism" to be in most of its forms nearly as empty as "optimism." But I am obliged to admit that I have not followed these questions to the necessary depth. I can't blame myself for not having been a stern moralist; I can always use the excuse that I'm after all nothing but a writer of fiction. But I don't feel satisfied with what I have done to date, except in the comic form. There is, however, this to be added—that our French friends invariably see the answers to such questions, and all questions of truth, to be overwhelmingly formidable, uncongenial, hostile to us. It may be, however, that truth is not always so punitive. I've tried to suggest

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this in my books. There may be truths on the side of life. I am quite prepared to admit that being habitual liars and self-deluders, we have good cause to fear the truth, but I'm not at all ready to stop hoping. There may be some truths which are, after all, our friends in the universe.

—GORDON LLOYD HARPER

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LAMMAS DREAM POEM

This is what comes of a Lammas Eve, tho I did not think of that at all this year until I had awakend at two in the night with the lines "My mother would be a falconress, And I a falcon at her wrist" being repeated insistently in my mind. I got up and took my notebook into the kitchen, for it would not let go. And when I wrote down the hour and date, I saw it was Lammas. "August 1, 1964," I wrote: "Lammas tide, 2 AM." Then I remembered that George Stanley had told me that Saturn, my birth-planet, was particularly brilliant in the sky. "But that's between one- thirty and two in the morning," he said, "long after you are asleep."

There is a curious misplacement upward in the dream poem, for the bell which is actually attacht to a falcon's leg by a bewit just above the jess, in the dream becomes a set of bells sewn round the hood, a ringing of sound in the poet-bird's thought.

My mother would be a falconress,
and I, her gay falcon treading her wrist,
would fly to bring back
from the blue of the sky to her, bleeding, a prize,
where I dream in my little hood with many bells
jangling when I'd turn my head.

My mother would be a falconress,
and she sends me as far as her will goes.
She lets me ride to the end of her curb
where I fall back in anguish.
I dread that she will cast me away,
for I fall, I mis-take, I fail in her mission.

She would bring down the little birds.
And I would bring down the little birds.
When will she let me bring down the little birds?
pierced from their flight with their necks broken,
their heads like flowers limp from the stem?

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I tread my mother's wrist and would draw blood.
Behind the little hood my eyes are hooded.
I have gone back into my hooded silence,
talking to myself and dropping off to sleep.

For she has muffled my dreams in the hood she has made me,
sewn round with bells, jangling when I move.
She uses a barb that brings me to cower.
She sends me abroad to try my wings
and I come back to her. I would bring down
the little birds to her
I may not tear into, I must bring back perfectly.

I tear at her wrist with my beak to draw blood,
and her eye holds me, anguisht, terrifying.
She draws a limit to my flight.
Never beyond my sight, she says.
She trains me to fetch and to limit myself in fetching.
She rewards me with meat for my dinner
but I must never eat what she sends me to bring her.

Yet it would have been beautiful, if she would have carried me,
always, in a little hood with the bells ringing,
at her wrist, and her riding
to the great falcon hunt, and me
flying up to the curb of my heart from her heart
to bring down the skylark from the blue to her feet,
straining, and then released for the flight.

My mother would be a falconress
and I her gerfalcon, raised at her will,
from her wrist sent flying, as if I were her own
pride, as if her pride
knew no limits, as if her mind
sought in my flight beyond the horizon.

Ah, but high, high in the air I flew.
And far, far beyond the curb of her will,

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were the blue hills where the falcons nest,
and then I saw west to the dying sun,
It seemed my human soul went down in flames.

I tore at her wrist, at the hold she had for me,
until the blood ran hot and I heard her cry out,
far, far beyond the curb of her will
to horizons of stars beyond the ringing hills of the world
where the falcons nest
I saw, and I tore at her wrist with my savage beak.
I flew, as if sight flew from the anguish in her eye beyond
her sight,
sent from my striking loose, from the cruel strike at her wrist,
striking out from the blood to be free of her.

My mother would be a falconress,
and even now, years after this,
when the wounds I left her had surely healed,
and the woman is dead,
her fierce eyes closed, and if her heart
were broken, it is stilld;
I would be a falcon and go free.
I tread her wrist and wear the hood,
talking to myself, and would draw blood.

—ROBERT DUNCA

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Two Poems by Carl Rakosi

THE FOUNDING OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

A slender plank above a waterhole,
planted on end to meet my wants,
I hear its whisper in the stock.
It does not sway a hair's breadth.
Another stake driven in and well shaved
points against the light from the layout,
poor pointing.
The maple fits upon the joist like a flower,
a picked beam,

a great wood to plane and saw.
I tell my wife the walls are up,
the strips nailed at snug right angles,
the floors are oiled.
The Yankee poles are almost columns.

Braced against a gloomy magnitude,
I loiter civil on my soles and buffeted,
killing time in these traditions.
Are the woodsmells getting sweeter,
or the broker working at my back,
so that all the concord in my timber
can not warm this house.

THE LOBSTER

To W. C. Williams

Eastern Sea, 100 fathoms,
green sands, pebbles,
broken shells.

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Off Suno Saki, 60 fathoms,
gray sand, pebbles,
bubbles rising.

Plasma-bearer
and slow-
motion benthos!

The fishery vessel Ion
drops anchor here collecting
plankton smears and fauna.

Plasma-bearer,
visible sea-purge,
sponge and kelp leaf.

Halicystus the Sea Bottle
resembles emeralds
and is the largest
cell in the world.

Young sea-horse Hippocampus
twenty minutes old,
nobody has ever
seen this marine
freak blink.
It radiates
on terminal vertebrae
a comb of twenty
upright spines
and curls
its rocky tail.

Salt-flush lobster bull,
encrusted, swims backwards
from the rock,

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Shorefront and the Lobster*

for William Carlos Williams and Carl Rakosi

Writing with swiftness concerning the movement of water,
of startled fishes, the lavender sea-fan, the lobster,
you have omitted the arch of sand and the rigmarole

of small streets. Magnificence is not the point, but Marblehead
is at least a certain example. Background consists
of American Primitive painting—"Spirit of '76"—

the shape of streets, ice-cream stands, ART with a capital A
(as seen through the summer in empty galleries, and
in the rocking chairs of hotel piazzas). But at this time

of year, when the frost is just out of the ground,
lobster traps are accessory to the fact, and they lie
in rows by the green-painted shack while Peter Ambroisa

mends his nets in the sunlight. He gazes beyond red rocks
toward the blue-green water; hopes for a lengthy season;
inspects his beautiful buoys of scarlet and sunflower yellow.

The Portuguese are a fine race. Gloucester might be
a tragic city without them, although this age can offer
little of the heroics of Iceland fishermen.

Peter's wife is a native of Gloucester; she is also
the mother of fourteen children: five at school, two of them
at the shipyards, one a seamstress, and six

---

* *An unsigned poem in the collection of William Carlos Williams manuscripts in the Lockwood Library, Buffalo, N. Y.*

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of them dead. Finished with mending, Peter stalks
the shorefront, a terrace of granite and slatternly shops,
to talk with other fishermen—wind and bright weather—

Red lobsters boiled and the lobster alive but green
are not for Peter a problem, rather, the act of God.
He has propagated the race; he makes a living; the dogs

do not bark at him. He has even been painted by one
of the realer artists, not recognizably Peter Ambroisa,
but nevertheless, a painting sold for five hundred dollars.

Water rises up the beach to the causeway wall.
It is time for dinner, and Peter goes by a back street
pushing a twig of lilac bush through his permanent Panama hat.

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Meret Oppenheim

Born in Berlin of a German father and a Swiss mother, Meret Oppenheim began her artistic career while still in school: her first collage, which was later accepted into the surrealist canon, was executed in a high school notebook. At eighteen she came to Paris where, in addition to attending academic courses in art, she produced paintings and drawings that won her the admiration of Alberto Giacometti and Jean Arp. Thanks to them, she was invited to exhibit with the Surrealist group at the *Salon des Surindépendants* (1933).

Meret Oppenheim's works from 1932 to 1937 include numerous paintings, collages and *objets*, of which the best-known is perhaps the *Fur-lined Teacup*, bought by the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1936. Many items of this period have been lost, a fact made all the more regrettable by the subsequent self-imposed withdrawal of the artist from public view: a withdrawal lasting more than fifteen years, during which she allowed only a few works to be exhibited and of which she has destroyed almost every trace.

Since 1959 Meret Oppenheim has begun exhibiting again, notably at the Paris Surrealist Exhibition in 1959–60, where her much-imitated event, *Diner sur une femme nue*, made a sensation, and at the *Surrealismo e Arte fantastico* Exhibition at the São Paolo Biennale (1965).

The Blue Lady 44 *in. high* *Painted wood* 1960

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The Green Spectator 68 in. × 8 in. *Copper and painted wood* 1959

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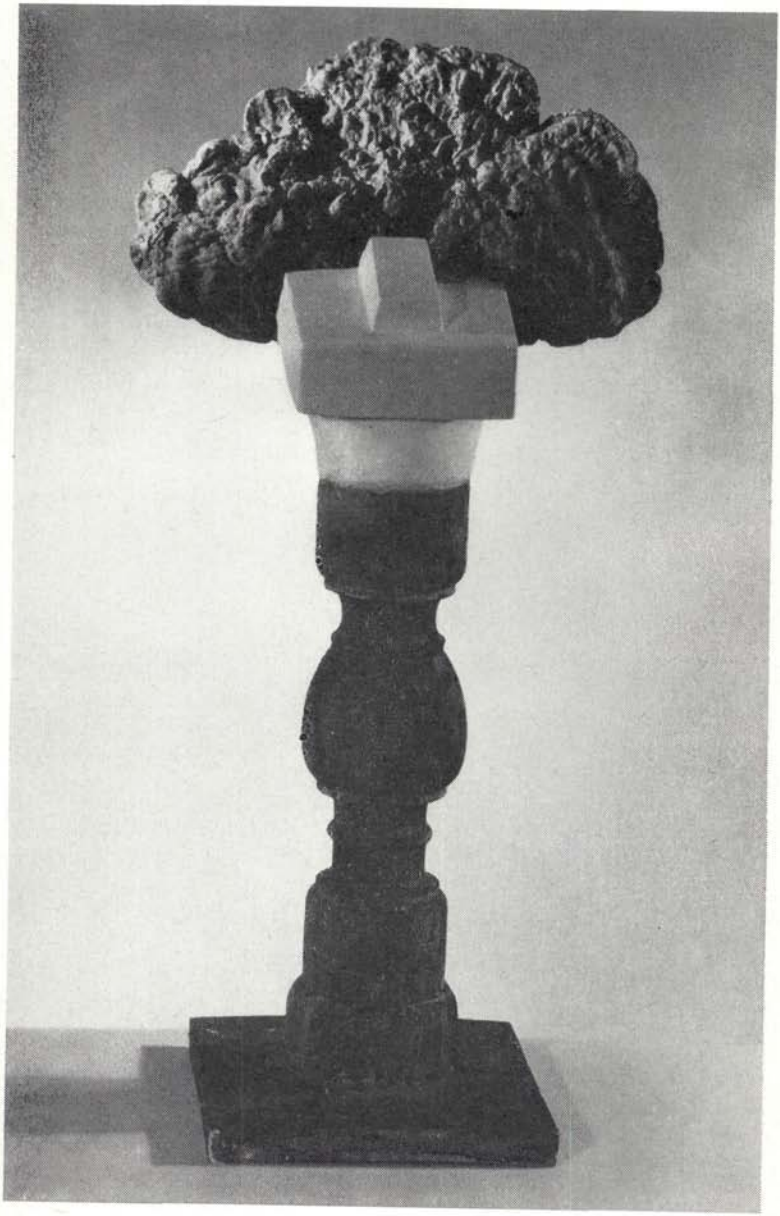

Idol 24 in. high Wood, plaster and tree fungus 1961

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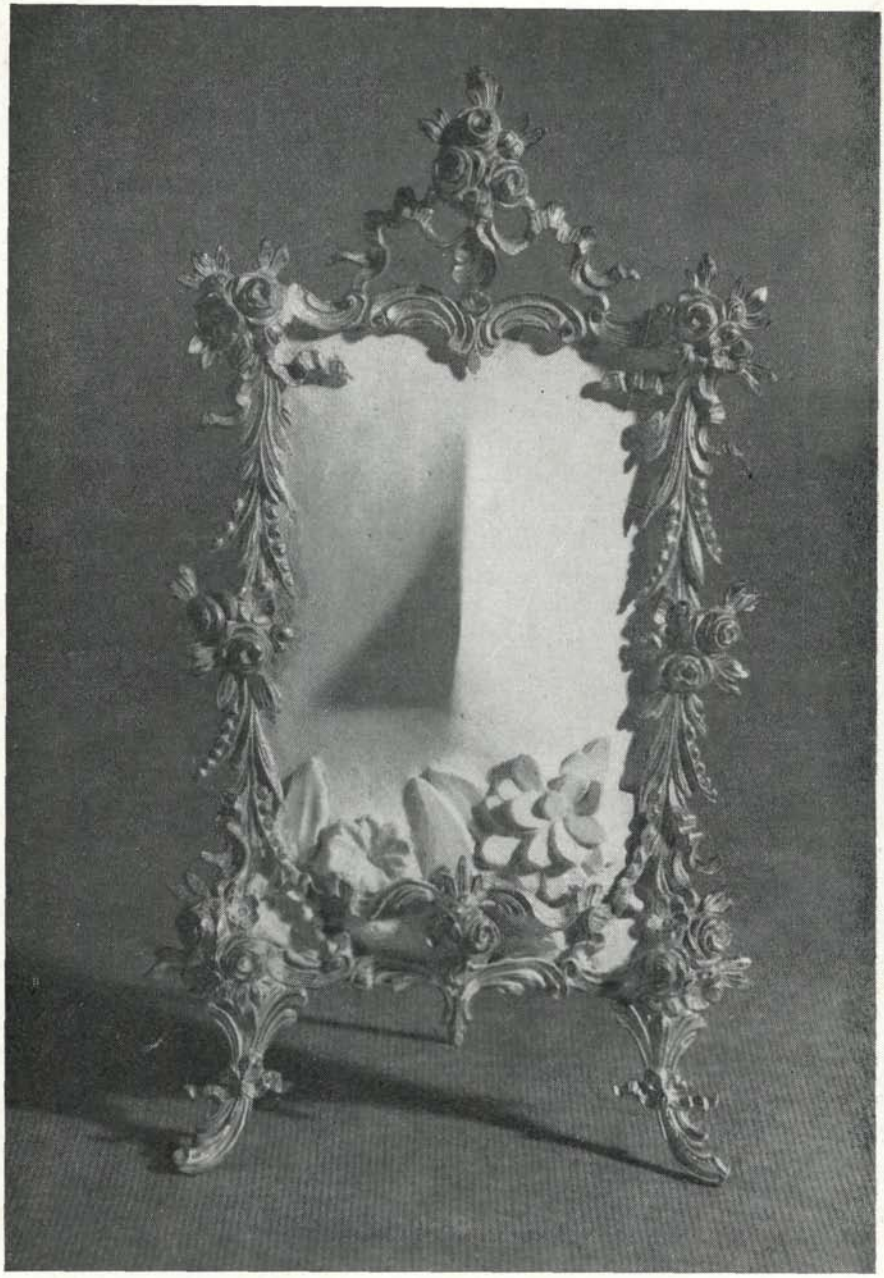

Miss Gardenia 6 in. × 11 in. *Bronze frame and plastic* 1962

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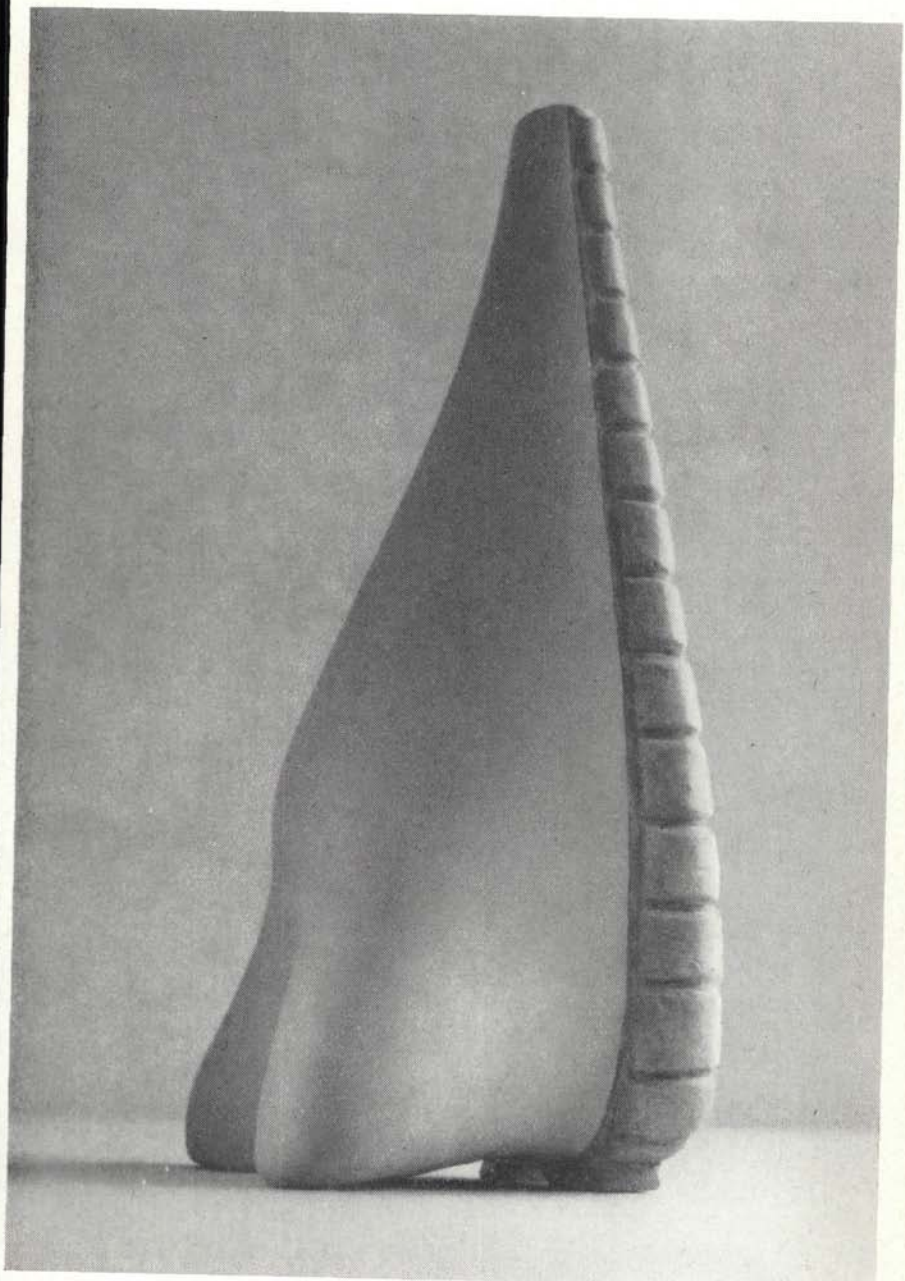

Primitive Venus 18 in. high Terra cotta 1962

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Cloud Over the Bridge 19 *in. high* *Painted plastic* 1963

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Cloud Over a Ship 15 *in. high* *Painted plastic* 1963

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Six Clouds Over the Bridge 28 *in. high* *Plastic* 1963

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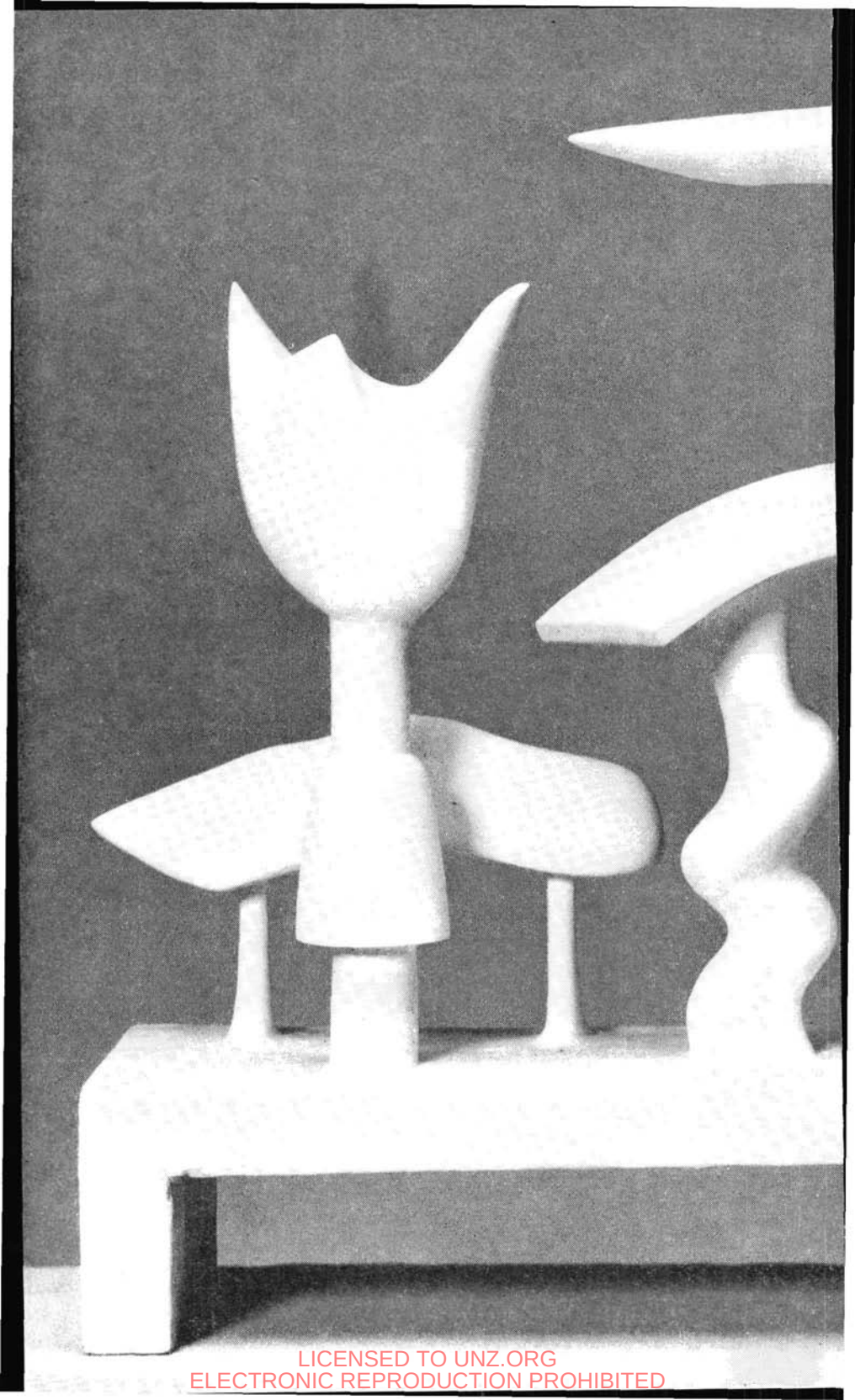

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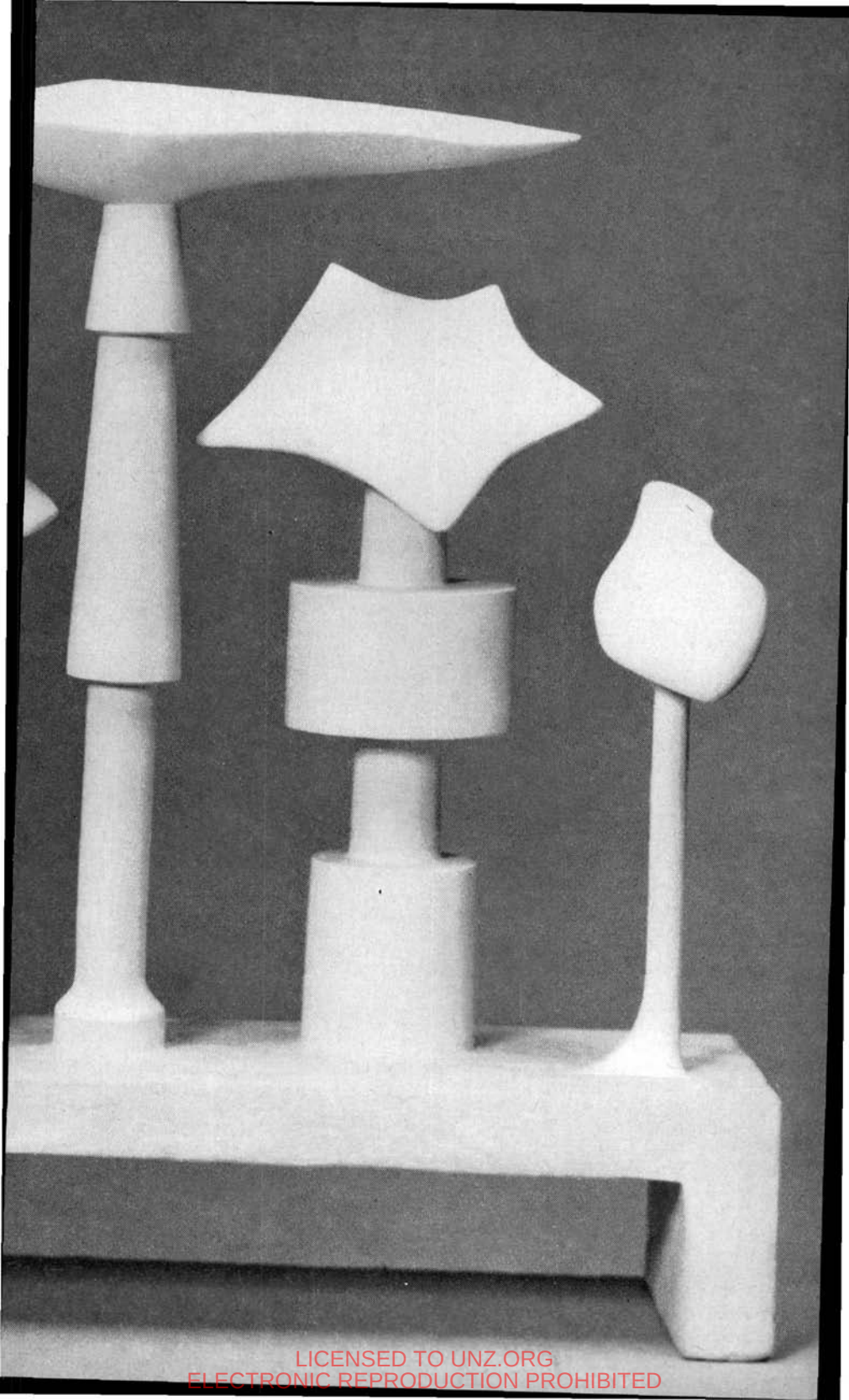

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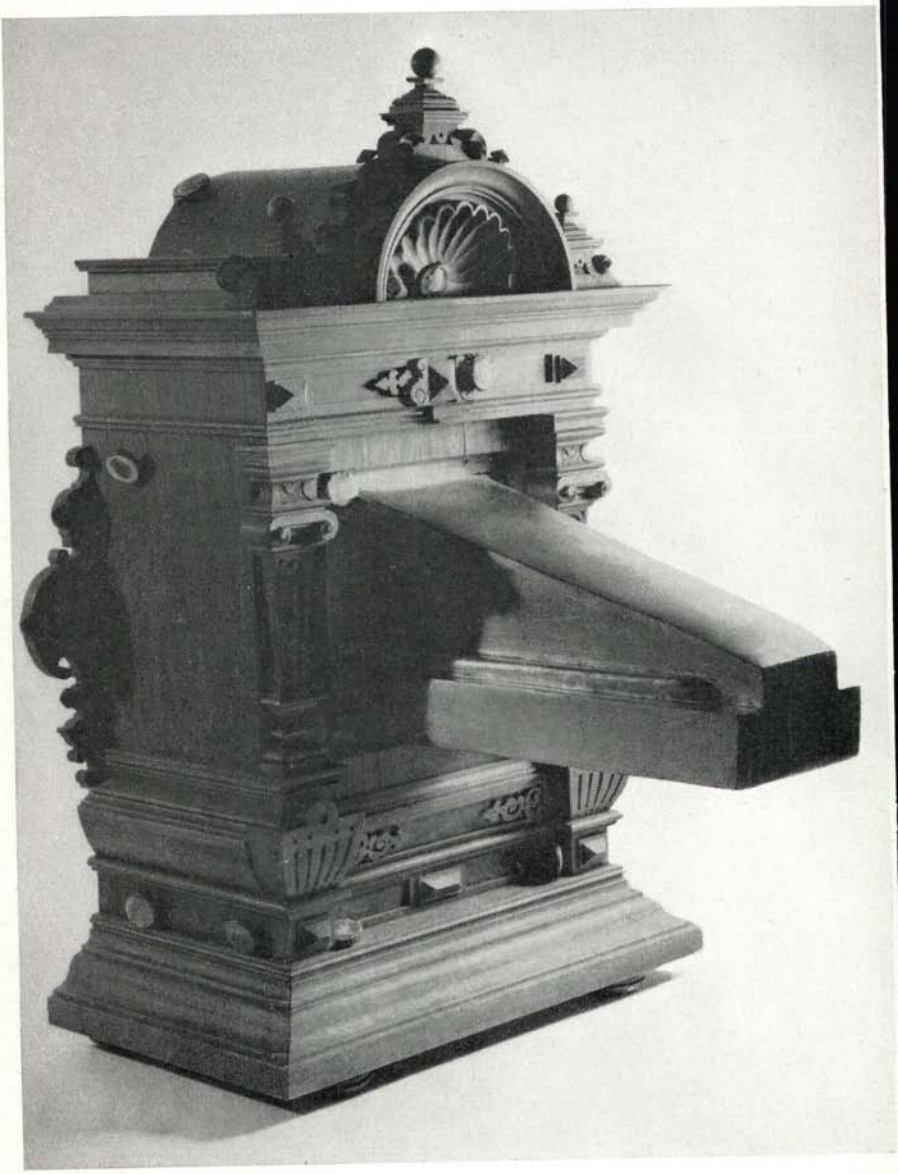

Demon with the Head of a Wild Beast 25 in. high Wood 1961

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THE NEW NIGHTGOWN

i believe you, i
believe you. but
tho you be the fool,
and me the hanged
man, let us both
transfer to magician.
it would be nice
to run our own world.

what else is there
to offer you or myself,
save myself as
man—as for you a
self as woman you are—
and about this we, like
others, over-read, under-
read, do every damned thing
save live.
the way out
is via the door; how is it
no one will use this
method? confucius asked
a long time ago.

put pants on the piano legs,
secret holes in the nightshirts.
have two women all over you, or
three men. the body has apertures,
the hands and the tongue reach out;
why is it we so rarely satisfy or
are happy ourselves? this is no
simple question of potency, it is
mass communications in the raw.

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shall i say that if i
had four cocks they
would be for you—but
would solve nothing for
either of us that is
not already solvable
by other means. as, if
you had four cunts all
for me, what would i
do with the three
others? i am trying
to talk to you three
days before i pass out of
christhood or alexandrianism,
and i am sick unto death,
again, with judaeo-
christian graeco-roman
shit. i want you as
i never raved before—
and still can/t talk
straight, or touch, and, yes,
still drink.

> "she was coming on to getting
> married age and she stay out/til
> five one morning. now you know
> she got to have a red belly then."

what, i keep asking, do these
have to do with us—and
know how tightly tied all
of it is with every hard-on
i get or every wet pussy you
find yourself with. and, too,
the elegance of the new
nightgown—tho our angers

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flare and rage it may be there
the answers are—in elegance,
no cop-out, simple statement.
what power implied!
what power to tap! only
one cunt necessary then, only
one cock. and the rages part
of it—it/s mine goddam
it, leave it alone! as,
sometimes, blindly lashing
out: i hate you mother-
fucker! well why not?
if there is strength to
sustain it. if i can stand
being loved i can stand
being hated. that simple.
and to act simply in time
of trouble, that too. i
will fix your bra the same
way i go to work. as i
think to present my life
to you, the simplicities,
complexities, inanities,
unswallowablenesses.
there. there. there.
how shall i touch you?
how reach out? how
lift up my hand? how
lay it tenderly? how
roughly? how meaningfully?
by lifting my hand and
reaching out tenderly
roughly meaningfully.
the way out is via the door.
you know she got to have
a red belly. i/m to
have an axe again. i had
my dick all along, as you

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your sweet cunt. why is it
no one will use this method?
let us not forget elegance.
let us make some simple
move to satisfy ourselves.
let us attack the central
problem of desire, by
desiring. nympholepsy,
that rapt state induced by
craving for the unattainable,
if it must come to that, but
there are better endings.

i hereby firmly resolve
to try to reach you as long
as i want to reach you.
what a reasonable fucking
statement, without even imagery.
the other rules are:

never be martyred in your own bed;
refuse to answer any questions you can/t;
you can/t fight a revolution without love;
fantasies ought to be discussed.

i reach out to touch you and
find flesh, which sometimes
disconcerts me, that/s where
our world has gone to, this
time, i didn/t know that was
what to expect. and am
conscious that kissing your
tits i remind you that you
are a woman, as, if i get
an erection, it is to
fuck you with.

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ceremonies
exist in
the mind

ceremoniously i
undressed and
dressed you, then
the air changed.
it became real
instead.
but

ceremonies still
cannot be damned,
well used can
indeed make sense, and
can move to a
different reality.

i wish it would
all happen at the same time,
and we would know it.

—JOEL OPPENHEIMER

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Two Poems by Philip Lamantia

THORN OF THE AIR

On the
invisible
telegraph
—by moonlit
bark & twigs—

a constant
heartbeat
transmits
Spain
connecting us
to the schisms
of star & seed

signed: the
american seer

...Madrid, last capitol of the silence...

thru corridors of 9,000 lungs, wand/legged ladies
protected from slow muffle machines
which mysteriously commingle the clouds
with you, city of the Uumm/wheel, city
of suave chrome, above all: of breathless Lorca
moons & Gongora shadows still roving, I see,
the filly trees—straight as spanish truth!

...El Paseo Castellana, 3 in the morning
—behold, this bluejeaned worker
apparitions sweeping the arboled pavement for
cafe/heads to drink purely from these breathing
ladies within & beyond you, that cross Two
Capitols of the Silence: O pivot
of evocation... O mediation
of the marvelous! 1965, you are again:
first city of the western Serene!

open mouth of silence
that cups tomorrow from the thorn of the air!

★

★ ★

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THE FLYING FIX

As I write
into
the secret

some lion/
tamer moves &
makes light

stretch
beyond
Circle Pant

while
a winged
Eye
flies free
from *snake/*
into/bird

... and east
bound it
goes to
measure

the wind!

The getting & losing of it
beer, my right hand
branches radiate from
the sun... getting & losing it
... going out from sun to seed to
branch to fruit AND
BACK AGAIN
... it's by losing *it*
it comes back!

never question
feel of sun & taste of
light thru weathers & sudden
heart/beats, fears sleep as
silence pervades... clear words
O brothers!

the brain melts away

SleepWaking by Heart/Din
heart of wheat, eye of beer
... the passing crowd asleep thinks
it's awake, but HA! no *questions* &
LO! THE IMMEDIATE ANSWER!—enuf! or
I'll lose it to say more—

they're selling socks, rattling
tables, squeeks against the constant
roar of the lion inside!

* * *

* Paris, Taurus, 1965

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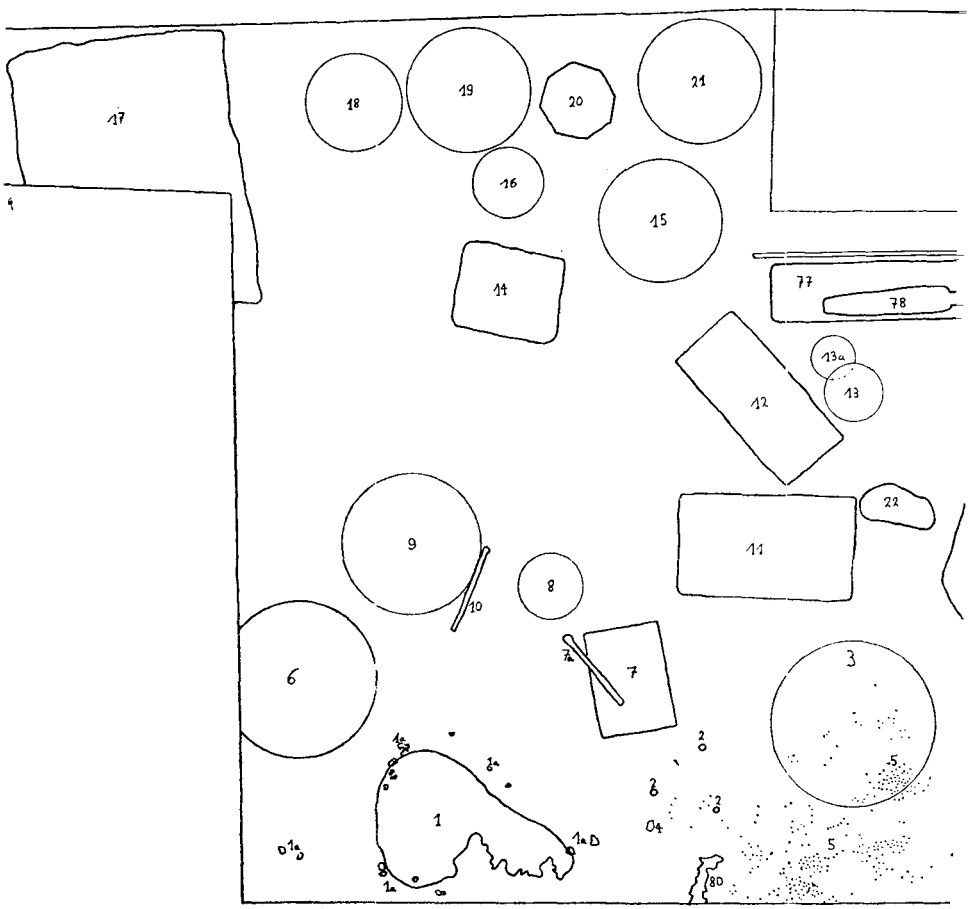
An Anecdoted Topography

DANIEL SPOERRI

Translated from the French a



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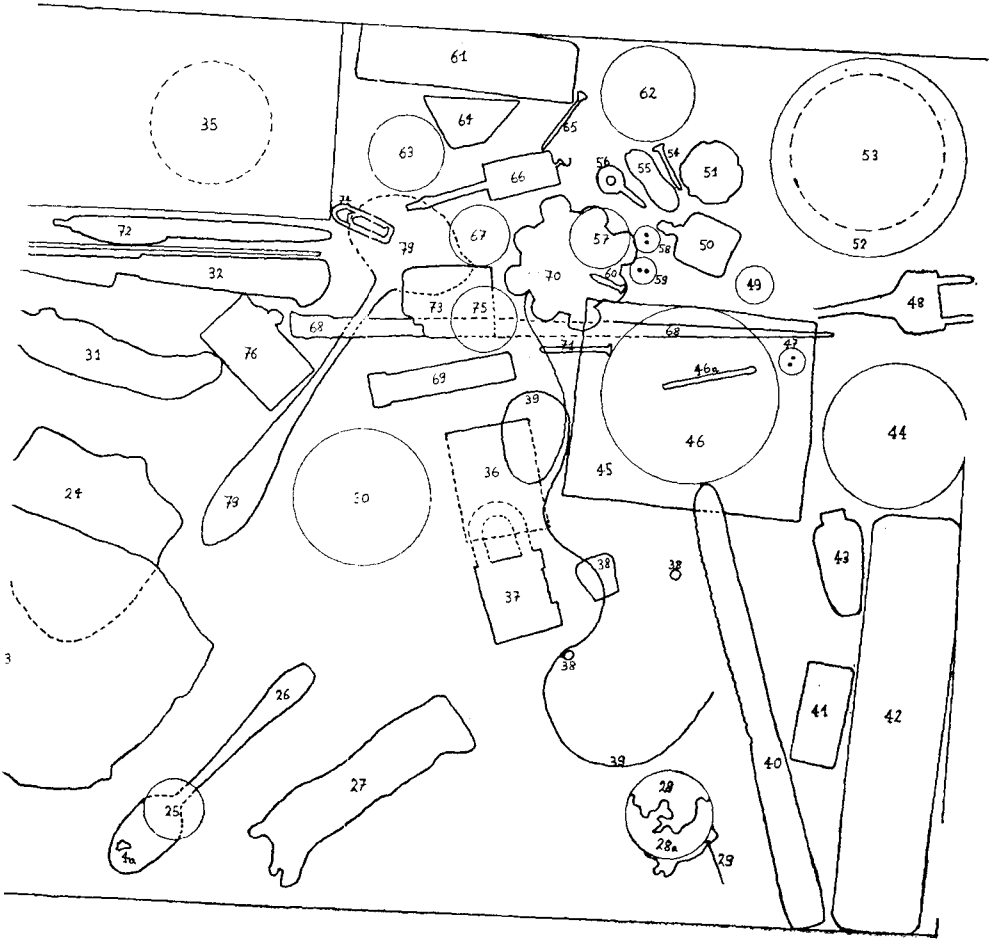
# of Chance

urther anecdoted by

EMMETT WILLIAMS



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Introduction

In my (*Tr. Note 1.*) room, No. 13 on the fifth floor of the Hotel Carcassonne at 24 Rue Mouffetard, to the right of the entrance door, between the stove and the sink, stands a table that VERA painted blue one day to surprise me. I have set out here to see what the objects on a section of this table (which I could have made into a snare-picture) (*see Appendix II*) might suggest to me, what they might spontaneously awaken in me in describing them: the way SHERLOCK HOLMES, starting out with a single object, could solve a crime; (*see Appendix III*) or historians, after centuries, were able to reconstitute a whole epoch from the most famous fixation in history, Pompeii.

In case it might be helpful in understanding this experiment, I should state that it was after constructing a pair of eyeglasses equipped with needles to poke the eyes out that I felt the urge to recreate objects through the memory instead of actually displaying them. (*Tr. Note 2.*)

On the preceding two pages of this excerpt is a map (the irregular shape is the same as that of the table: wishing to replace a single-burner alcohol stove with a two-burner one, I had to saw off a piece) of a topography based on chance and the disorder that I snared Oct. 17, 1961, at 3:47 p.m. Each outlined object is numbered, and the game I suggest is to choose a shape on the map and look up the corresponding numbered paragraph in the text. Notes have been added whenever there were texts or other data relating to an object.

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At the end of the text is a biographical index of all persons cited in the descriptions of objects, notes and appendices.

— D.S.

TRANSLATOR'S POSTSCRIPTUM TO SPOERRI'S INTRODUCTION

Postscriptum (by the translator): The appearance of the first edition of the *Topographie Anecdotée du Hasard* was made possible by funds placed at the author's disposal by Galerie LAWRENCE in Paris to publish the topography in place of a more traditional catalogue, and coincided with the opening of his exhibition there in February 1962. (*Tr. Note 3.*)

An enlarged French edition was begun four months after the commencement of the first. To show that his room was not always in disorder, and for contrast, SPOERRI added to the topography of chance a topography of order based on the blue table as it appeared Feb. 21, 1962, at 8:07 p.m. All notes to the enlarged edition have been printed in italics to distinguish them from the notes to the first edition. And a second map, numbered in Roman numerals, shows graphically the difference between the two situations.

This English translation, begun almost three years after the preparation of the enlarged French edition, is larger still, increased in bulk by new notes of the author, translator and others.

The heights of all objects in the topography of chance are given in Appendix I, and printed on the jacket of the book is a panoramic photograph of the author's room composed by VERA SPOERRI from fifty-five detailed photos.—E.W.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

#1—My room, too, during the author's absence from Paris to prepare an exhibition in New York. Thus I begin this translation (I must here and now place myself in the position of SIGMUND FREUD who, when undertaking the translation of

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CHARCOT's *Lessons* in a hotel only a few blocks away from the Hotel Carcassonne, confessed to the master that he had "motor aphasia in French but not sensory aphasia".) at 9 p.m. on the first day of December 1964, only an arm's length away from the principal terrain feature of the topography, the blue table. (*See Appendix V.*)

(As I finished typing the words "blue table" this seventh day of July 1965 in Pfungstadt, West Germany, where I am preparing the final version of the first English edition of the topography, a telegram arrived from Paris informing me of the author's forthcoming visit to oversee the last draft of the manuscript. The message in full: SATURDAYBABA LIBUBUNIGHT DANIELENKO.)

#2—These spectacles are illustrated in *L'Optique Moderne, Collection de Lunettes Presentée par* DANIEL SPOERRI *avec, en regard, d'inutiles notules par* FRANÇOIS DUFRÊNE, published by Fluxus. A reviewer in the *London Times Literary Supplement* of Sept. 3, 1964, described this volume as a "stout booklet of photographs showing this thin-faced author-editor-dancer-impresario wearing numerous novel types of spectacles, with characteristic small punning, assonant verses by FRANÇOIS DUFRÊNE on the even (orange-and-black) pages."

Said spectacles were first exhibited as a work of art at Galerie KOEPCKE in Copenhagen in September 1961. They were later exhibited as part of a mounted collection of spectacles in New York in 1964, and soon afterwards destroyed at a junkie party in the same city. SPOERRI was not present at the party; he managed to salvage only a few fragments of the collection.

In the Introduction and in his notes on the development of the snare-picture (*Appendix II*), the author attributes the genesis of the present work to the threat of these dangerous spectacles. Elsewhere (No. 36, note†††††), however, he traces the idea of writing his "human garbage can" to the first time he saw one of ARMAN's "garbage cans": "Shortly afterwards I emptied mine on the floor, and I thought about how I could retrace the history of each scrap." (There is yet

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another, and more involved, account of the origin of the topography in No. 25, note†††.)

#3—Of this edition, a *London Times Literary Supplement* reviewer wrote: "Editions Galerie LAWRENCE (13, Rue de Seine, Paris 6e) have published another of M. SPOERRI's *jeux d'esprit*: his *Topographie Anecdotée du Hasard*. This soberly presented booklet is a catalogue of the articles that happened to be on the compiler's highly confused working, eating and drinking table at a particular instant of 1961. It is written in a scholarly style that any bibliographer, museum director or art historian might be proud of: exact particulars of the inscription on the label of the bottle of Vin des Rochers (*le velours de l'estomac*) bought that morning and drunk during the catalogue's compilation, and similar erudite details of a moderately untypical random collection of mid-twentieth-century objects." (Sept. 3, 1964.)

(Editor's Note: The following text is taken from An Anecdoted Topography of Chance, *a book to be published in February, 1966, by The Something Else Press in New York. We thank them for permission to reprint these excerpts.)*

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1
Piece of white bread

with a bite out of it, sliced from a loaf bought yesterday (Oct. 16, 1961) but cut only this morning by the actress RENATE STEIGER, who came for breakfast with her husband, CLAUS BREMER. I don't usually eat breakfast, but since they were about to return to Switzerland, via a business detour to Brussels and Hamburg, we had decided to get together once more (No. 30). As for the piece of bread that remained from said breakfast, KICHKA BATICHEFF took a bite out of it at noon with two soft-boiled eggs, *Tr. Note 1*, but she didn't finish it either from lack of appetite or because this snack was her second or her n^{th}.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 1

The author, off and on for about three years, has been so preoccupied with the preparation of an "eggcyclopedia" that many of his friends call him "DAN THE EGG MAN." The book will explore the subject through such fields as advertising and alchemy, biology and business, cartoons and cookery, dancing and destiny, fables and feathers, garbage and games, happenings and hygiene, incubation and intrigue, journalism and juggling, the *Kabbalah* and the *Koran*, limericks and lapis lazuli, musicology and medicine, noodles and names, optics and orgasm, prophecy and poaching, quackery and quattrocento, radioactivity and ribaldry, sturgeon and sculpture, taboos and tattoos, vaginal stimulation and VIRGIL, warbling and WITTGENSTEIN, Yiddish yarns and yoga, and zombiism and Zen, to pick a few categories at random. I myself caught the egg bug from the author, and after a month of intense, and pleasurable, research surrounded by my books at the Château de Ravenel was able to hand over to him more than 115 prime egg quotations in German, French, English, Spanish, Italian, Greek and Latin.

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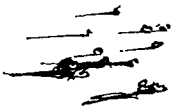

1a

Crumbs†

from the slice of white bread with a bite out of it (No. 1).††

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

†"Whenever bread was sliced, a basket was placed under the knife, to catch whatever fell, to which were carefully added all the scraps from the meal, and these leftovers, fried on Sunday with a little butter, formed the festive dish for the Day of Rest."

—D.A.F., *Tr. Note 1*, DE SADE, *Justine ou les malheurs de la Vertu*, œuvres complètes, Tome II, chez JEAN-JACQUES PAUVERT éditeur, Paris 1961, page 34 (JUSTINE as servant to the household of the miser MONSIEUR DU HARPIN).

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 1

D.A.F. is a short cut through LOUIS-DONATIEN-FRANÇOIS-ALPHONSE (OF ALDONZE), only son of the COMTE DE SADE, Chevalier-comte de la Coste et de Mazan, Seigneur de Saumane, Lieutenant-général pour le roi de la Haute et Basse Bresse, Bugey, Valromey et Gex. Ironically, one of the Marquis' direct ancestors was the husband of PETRARCH'S LAURA. (See No. 25, Translator's Note 1.)

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

††I have just received, on the day of the hanging of the five snare-pictures made by ADDI KOEPCKE under license from me (see Appendix II, paragraph 9) at the Mai Udstillingen in Copenhagen, and I hope the last day of work on this interminable topography, a letter from him containing a collage to which is affixed a piece of red paper, torn out of a German magazine, bearing these words: "Stets krümelfreier Tisch durch Krümel fangleiste"—no more crumby tablecloths thanks to Crumscoop.

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2

Pale-green egg cup

of very light plastic standing on three tiny legs, bought with three others of different color last Saturday at the Uniprix five-and-ten on Avenue GÉNÉRAL LECLERC. I was in that quarter to cash a check for 706 francs, payable at a bank at No. 5 on that avenue, which ARTURO SCHWARZ (See No. 38, Note††) had sent me. Just opposite the bank is the Uniprix where I went to look for a lot of little trinkets to give KICHKA's sister, who was coming to celebrate her birthday with us in my room that afternoon. I gave her three of the egg cups, and the fourth one stayed in my room, and KICHKA used it at noon today to eat her eggs (No. 1, 1a). Still in the egg cup is the shell of the egg that I bought this morning, along with three others for 35 centimes apiece, at the dairy store on the Place de la Contrescarpe, whose proprietor, at the end of the day, feeds his perishable leftovers to the neighborhood bums, who heap coarse insults on him when they don't find the leftovers to their liking. *Tr. Note 1.* Two of these eggs were eaten by BREMER this morning and the other by RENATE (No. 1). *Tr. Note 2.*

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 1

The dairy store has disappeared, giving way to yet another café, Les Arts, but the artists of the quarter have boycotted it so far. Once this week, and twice last week, I almost entered it—to get milk and cheese for breakfast. It is a hard habit to break after buying dairy products at that corner off and on since 1949. As for the bums, they are still around, sleeping and frolicking on the square except for those brief periods when the police wagons transport them to the suburbs for delousing.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 2

How many eggs did KICHKA eat? In No. 1, the author states clearly that at noon KICHKA BATICHEFF ate a bite of white bread "with two soft-boiled eggs" (*avec deux oeufs à la coque*). It was the slice of bread that she did not finish (*mais elle ne l'a pas terminée)*—singular—and not the *deux oeufs*—plural.

In No. 2, the author says that KICHKA used the egg cup to eat her eggs (*ses oeufs*) —plural. In the egg cup, he informs us, is the shell of *one* of the eggs KICHKA ate, and this *one* of the two eggs KICHKA ate was one of four bought that morning for 35 centimes apiece. Two of these four eggs were eaten by BREMER, we are told, and one by RENATE. That leaves one egg—not two—for KICHKA to have eaten.

The eggshell debris in Nos. 4 and 4a, as outlined in the table (p.98) is too scanty to offer any clues, and could be from any or all of the eggs, assuming in either case that most of the debris was either not placed on the blue table or later removed.

No. 5 tells us that KICHKA salted "her egg" (*son oeuf*). This could mean (a) that she ate only one egg or (b) that she ate one salted and one unsalted.

Nos. 7 and 7a would seem to rule out that she ate only one egg, and confirm that she ate one salted and one unsalted: "A match used to light the alcohol stove ... undoubtedly by KICHKA to boil her eggs" *(ses oeufs)* plural, as does No. 10 ("probably the very match used in place of the match in No. 7a"). The burnt match in No. 46 is not expressly linked with the eggs and can be ignored here.

But No. 12 rules out what Nos. 7 and 7a seemed to confirm, for here the author informs us that the salt from the carton of Socosel was "used by KICHKA to salt her *eggs* (*ses oeufs*)—both of them!

No. 26, a spoon with the remains of egg yolk on it, gives no clue to how many eggs KICHKA ate, although it is most likely yolk from KICHKA's egg or eggs, and not from BREMER's two or STEIGER's one. I say "most likely" because KICHKA ate her egg or eggs *after* the departure of BREMER and STEIGER; and since the author has never to my knowledge (which covers years of familiarity with his room and its contents) had more than two spoons suitable for eating eggs in the shell at any one time, the spoon or spoons that BREMER and STEIGER used was or were washed before KICHKA ate her egg or eggs.

I have pondered this problem over the months, and the only solution I have come up with is that BREMER ate but one egg. He normally enjoys a hearty breakfast, and the author might just possibly have assumed that BREMER ate more than STEIGER. After all, the situation was recreated *after* the event, and with the assistance of Vin des Rochers (see No. 3).

Whatever the facts were, I feel there is more truth than coquetry in the observation of MADAME RODIER, wife of the proprietor of Les Cinq Billards café, who, seeing the author reading the page proofs of the first edition of the topography in the café, remarked: "Why are you reading it if you wrote it yourself? Do you have such a short memory?"

(Since the above was written, a communication in the author's own hand from New York almost confirms my theory. Reporting on the breakfast habits of KICHKA in America, he writes: "KICHKA still eating eggs—not just now, she is sleeping, it is 1:17 a.m. But I would say an average of two or three eggs is normal—large size B because large size A has too much white. She feels there is just as much yolk in large size B, but less white. And she prefers that.")

(A still later communication from the author would seem to end the controversy once and for all: "Sorry, EMMETT, I think the final solution is that there was already an egg on the blue table before I bought the others." Although I cannot in honesty accept the consequences of this new "fact" as any kind of "final solution," I will close the matter here and now, and leave future speculation on the matter up to other readers and editors. We are, after all, dealing with a small quantity of eggs; how the problem pales when one remembers the panic of BLAISE CENDRARS who one morning in 1920 bought nine million eggs—the cargo of three ships—and sold the whole perishable lot by phone before the end of the day.)

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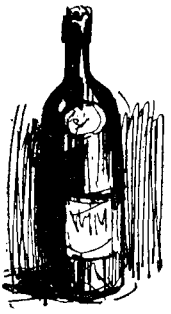

3
Liter of Vin des Rochers†

bought on the Rue Mouffetard this morning from my regular wine dealer, who calls me the "gentleman with the deep voice" and says from time to time: "With what I have seen in this place, I could write a novel stretching from here to Place MAUBERT."†† The liter cost 1 franc and 65 centimes plus 30 centimes deposit, and with it I received a free chance on, among other things, an automobile.††† The bottle is still half full, and I am in the process of finishing it now. (Nos. 25, 28, 28a.)††††

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

† On the label is the following data: "11% / Vin des Rochers / Lines your stomach with velvet / I guarantee this wine is made from wholesome and dependably pure juice / (illegible signature) / registered trademark / JULES LEONELLI & Co."

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

†† I erred. It wasn't the wine dealer who said "With what I ve seen in this place I could write a novel stretching from here to Place MAUBERT," *Tr. Note 1*, but GEORGES RODIER, proprietor of Les Cinq Billards café at Place de la Contrescarpe (see No. 70). An American, JOE CHAPEAU, set me straight on this point. He is called JOE CHAPEAU because of the filthy Spanish cowboy hat he always wears, which probably serves him as a source of inspiration for the delicate romantic portraits he paints. Just this morning MONSIEUR GEORGES expanded the philosophical observation of one of his customers, CAMILLE, that "Life is a shit sandwich" with: "Yes, and we take a bite every day."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 1

From Place de la Contrescarpe, the ever more fashionable haunt of bohemians at the top of the Rue Mouffetard, that dingy but animated crooked street of markets and

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stalls, more picturesque than hygienic, to Place MAUBERT, called a "cesspool" by ERASMUS but today only a drab and banal annex to the more exotic quarters of which it forms the axis, is .44 miles: a pleasant downhill walk along the Rue DESCARTES past the Esperanto bookshop, the house where VERLAINE died, a Chinese grocery store, the rear enclosing walls of the Lycée HENRI IV, the backside of ST.-ÉTIENNE-du-Mont (where RACINE is buried), across the Rue CLOVIS (with remains of the medieval city walls), then down the Rue de la Montagne-STE.-GENEVIÈVE past the Polytechnic Institute, several lesbian bars and VERA's apartment.

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

††† "Vin des Rochers / free lottery / Series L. No. 712017 / Drawing Nov. 30, 1961."

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

†††† RAYMOND HAINS, after reading the manuscript, astonished by this reference to Vin des Rochers, one entire evening developed for my benefit a whole train of ideas that I jotted down on a dozen cards which I have since lost. All I can remember is that he started out with an analysis of an essay by ETIEMBLE, "PAUL CLAUDEL et le Vin des Rochers," to which he wanted to reply in an article to be entitled, "ETIEMBLE et la Purée Soma," and that he passed in review SARTRE, GIDE and all literature. (For anyone interested, his address is 26 Rue DELAMBRE, Paris 14). *Tr. Note 2.*

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 2

To unfathom this note, I sought out HAINS at a party and attempted to communicate to him the following data: (a) that the *rocher* is the petrosal bone, and (b) that in the volume *La réalité dépasse la fiction, ou l'humour en liberté*, by ALBERT AYCARD and JACQUELINE FRANCK (GALLIMARD 1955) there is a photograph of a wall covered with a large poster advertising Claudel dairy products, "Normandy's best" (HAINS is from Normandy, and the author and I several years ago spent a night in ST. BRIEUC in a vain attempt to locate him), next to which is pasted an advertisement for the film version of PAUL CLAUDEL'S *Le Père Humilié* starring MARIA CASARÈS. After the party HAINS and I walked about the Left Bank until 8 a.m. discussing the subject, but I must confess that, like SPOERRI in the foregoing note, I wasn't able to recall a single point when I attempted to write about it the next day.

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4, 4a
Shell debris
(Nos. 1, 2).†

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

† From my childhood in Romania I remember a story that impressed me very much. Robbers attack a house, and the grandmother just has time to throw some egg shells into the oven. I don't remember why the robbers open the oven, or what kind of shells they are, but they explode and blind the robbers. Without doubt I have recalled this story because I am visiting my mother in the Bernese Alps after receiving a negative criticism of the topography from her in a letter that reproached me as follows:

"...Other passages saddened me a little, to see that my first-born writes such stupid things; with your talent you might have created better things, certainly more refined. I still have manuscripts from the days of your youth that show promise of greater ability; but it is true that our world is rotten, and your public wants to see and read such questionable things. Ah, my dear boy, don't be cross if I am a bit severe, but your mummy can't understand everything and it troubles her that her DANIEL isn't able to do something more positive with his gifts." *Tr. Note 1.*

(Jan. 19, 1962)

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 1

SPOERRI, FILLIOU and I have often discussed the wisdom—and disillusionment—reflected in the letters of our respective mothers, who, fortunately for us, but unfortunately for them, have never met. One recent letter from my own mother counsels me that "Life is like an onion, son: you peel it off layer by layer, and sometimes you weep." With considerable pride I sent her a copy of the *London Times Literary Supplement* with ten or so pictures of my "Son of Man Trio," to which she replied that she hoped none of her friends subscribed to the *London Times.* Considering my life a failure, she often ends her letters with the painful rhetorical question: "What did Dad and I do wrong?"

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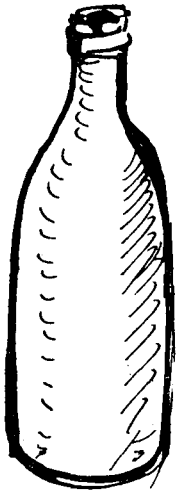

9
Half-liter bottle of milk

sealed, labeled "conditioned pasteurized† milk." (Subsequent note: as usual, I forgot to drink the milk, and had to throw it out later because it was completely curdled.)

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

† Excerpt from brochure accompanying the milk:

"Milk—your ally / PASTEUR and our daily milk / It was a Frenchman who made possible the rational exploitation of this national wealth. A Frenchman, a scientist, PASTEUR, the father of modern hygiene and inventor of pasteurization. This process consists of heating the milk at exactly 145 degrees FAHRENHEIT for thirty minutes in order to eliminate all the microbes and bacteria, without removing any of the vitamins, then cooling it rapidly to below 50 degrees before putting it into bottles sterilized at 230 degrees in which it keeps perfectly. PASTEUR carried out this operation for the first time in a garret of the École Normale which served as a laboratory for this outstanding researcher."

13, 13a
Fifty and 10 centime coins

the change left from a 1-franc piece given KICHKA to buy the white bread (Nos. 1, 1a, 24).

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16
Container of Vanilic glue

white plastic material, consisting of a squeezable receptacle ending in a flexible tube, its flexibility allowing it to penetrate between objects you want to glue† without moving them. Bought in the basement of the Bazar de l'Hotel de Ville department store two or three months ago for the sum of—if my memory is good—26 francs. (Nos. 18, 52.) *Tr. Note 1.*

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

† Surgery and glue: Doctors at the University of Texas, according to an article in *Der Spiegel* in April 1962, have used glue to reconnect severed arteries. After 170 successful experiments on dogs, the doctors tried the procedure on a man. The reconnected arteries healed perfectly in seven days, faster than by suturing.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 1

In some primitive cultures, houses are glued together with fecal matter.

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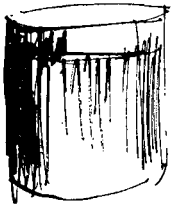
18
Transparent plastic container† of VR 200 glue



bought the beginning of September at ADAM'S on the Boulevard EDGAR QUINET, accompanied by chance by JANE, English and a painter, who had heard that it was the best artists' supply shop in Paris. I used it later in Copenhagen (No. 6 for Copenhagen, 16 and 52 for the glue).††

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

† A new model, probably, since FRANÇOIS DUFRÊNE, who corrected the French text of the topography, uses the same glue and was astonished by the existence of a transparent container, his—which he uses to glue his poster "bottoms" or "insides"—having always come in a can.

AUTHOR'S ADDTIONAL NOTE

†† I was cocoon enough to ask ALAIN JOUFFROY to comment on the topography. Here is his note to No. 18. (See also his notes to No. 32 and No. 34).

"The painters FERRO and PHILLIP MARTIN first mentioned this glue to me. PHILLIP MARTIN regards it as slightly superior in quality to the Vinavil that artists are currently using in Italy. It can be found at one of the basement counters at the Bazar de l'Hotel de Ville, where it is sold sometimes in plastic containers, sometimes in cans. I have used it for my own photo-collages, and I confess that I am not insensible to the pleasure of feeling it coat my fingers with a thin transparent film (which makes me think of the cocoons caterpillars secrete around themselves before moulting) after an hour or two of work. VR 200 and Vinavil are certainly among the most fascinating mediums an artist can use today, and constitute the material origin of a very large number of works of art that, without them, would have been inconceivable."

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20
Pretty glass jar

of sweet basil†, ††, ††† bought at Konsum Bolaget in Stockholm two days after the opening of the MAT†††† (multiplication of transformable art) exhibition there (Nos. 34e and 42), in the Vallingatan 42 Gallery which, by chance, belongs to the Konsum Bolaget chain. It was through the intermediation of PER OLOF ULTVEDT, who was at that time artistic adviser to the gallery, that I organized this exhibition comprising multiplied works of AGAM, ALBERS, BURY, DUCHAMP, MALINA, MARI, MUNARI, MAN RAY, ROT, SOTO, TINGUELY and VASARELY. *Tr. Note 1.* At the same time I bought two other jars in the same format, the first of celery salt (No. 15) which belongs to the snare-picture called "Flat-Iron" (the iron keeps falling off, I don't know for what reason: on the subject of glue see Nos. 16, 18 and 52), the second of Old Hickory Smoked Salt, to be found on the snare-picture "KICHKA's Breakfast" bearing, pasted underneath, the notice: "Do not touch, reserved for KICHKA" because she is very fond of it. *Tr. Note 2.*

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

† "KOCKEN's Basilikum används till; Tomaträtter, gula ärter, grönsaksoppor och fiskrätter, sallader, Kockens AB Stockholm."

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AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

†† Many persons read and reread the proofs of the first edition of the topography, yet one error slipped through: basil was misspelled "basilique" in French, instead of "basilic." The father of FRANÇOIS DUFRÊNE called my attention to the error, and to the triple signification of the sound in French: the herb, the mythological monster and the building.

AUTHOR'S RECENT NOTE

††† "The Greeks called their king *basileus*, and basil is still called 'king's herb' in Germany. Perhaps it played a mystical role in royal ceremonies because of its imposing aroma, or was used to ward off the fatal glance of the basilisk. This little herb is luxuriantly overgrown with superstition. The most ludicrous concerns the scorpion. Basil was formerly believed to be an antidote for scorpion bites; yet, if one rubbed basil leaves between two rocks, and covered them with a vase, a scorpion was supposed to come forth."

Erika Sangerberg,
Alle Unsere Gewürze,
Wancura Verlag
Wien-Köln, 1958

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

†††† Introduction to the catalogue:

"Edition MAT is the first attempt to multiply art outside the classical processes of reproduction (lithography, bronze casting, tapestry, etc.).

"For each work we have sought the means of multiplication it deserves. To this end, the idea inherent in the work must express itself without "personal handwriting," which would permit only reproduction and not multiplication.

"Objective, static art permits only quantitative multiplication of an idea fixed in the model, and even if it assures a wide diffusion of the object, the multiplication adds nothing to it. For animated objects, moving or changing optically, electrically or through the physical intervention of the spectator-collaborator, multiplication renders justice to the infinite possibilities of transformation.

"Each work is signed by the artist, and each will be offered in a limited edition of 100 numbered works for sale at the same price, $40, taking no account of the imponderables that influence the market value of a work of art."

—DANIEL SPOERRI, November 1959

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 1

After eight exhibitions in Europe, SPOERRI stopped production of the MAT collection. Then in 1964, at the suggestion of KARL GERSTNER, it was revived, with the help of Galerie Der Spiegel in Cologne. The 1964 collection of twelve new objects is almost sold out (July 12, 1965), and the 1965 and 1966 collections are in preparation, as well as the new Edition MAT-MOT, which will publish visual poetry.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 2

The author says here that the iron keeps falling off his snare-picture "Flat-Iron." Is it possible that the Old Hickory Smoked Salt has fallen off "KICHKA's Breakfast"? At any rate, it does not appear in the illustration of this snare-picture in the Museum of Modern Art's "The Art of Assemblage" (page 132). And in the museum's illustrated list of painting and sculpture acquired from January through December 1961, the work is described as follows: "KICHKA's Breakfast, 1960. Wooden chair, with board across seat, with coffee pot, tumbler, china, egg cups, egg shells, cigarette butts, spoons, tin cans, etc. $14^{3}/_{8}$" high, 27 $^{1}/_{2}$" deep (36.6 × 69.3 × 65.4 cm). PHILIP C. JOHNSON Fund. 391.61." In the museum's checklist of new acquisitions exhibited from Nov. 20, 1962, to Jan. 13, 1963, the same description is reprinted. The checklist includes the following data in connection with the picture: "SPOERRI calls himself a 'paster of found situations' : 'I was waiting for the visit of three people who wished to come to see my tricks. Two hours before they came, I pasted together the morning's breakfast which was still there by chance. (This chance was very lucky besides, because this breakfast I had had with KICHKA...)' Significance? 'A breakfast hung on the wall, which defies the laws of gravity and the angle of view to which we are accustomed.'" If the Old Hickory Smoked Salt was originally part of this snare-picture, apparently it was not able to defy the laws of gravity as long as the coffee pot, tumbler, china, egg cups, egg shells, cigarette butts, spoons, tin cans, etc. †††††

AUTHOR'S RECENT NOTE

††††† "You are wrong about the Old Hickory Smoked Salt. It belongs to 'KICHKA's Breakfast No. 2' and naturally you can't find it on 'KICHKA's Breakfast No. 1.' ARTURO SCHWARZ has 'KICHKA's Breakfast No. 2' in Milan. But please keep the note. DANIEL."

23
White paper bag

which contained the eggs (Nos. 1, 1a, 2, 4, 4a, 5, 12).

24
Chunk from the same loaf of white bread

as the piece with a bite out of it (Nos. 1, 1a, 13, 13a).

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25
Stopper of tricolored plastic

black-green-red, from the bottle of wine described in No. 3. Only Vin des Rochers uses these tricolored stoppers, and only since a short time, because they realized (a) that the colorless stopper previously used was almost invisible and that you were always pouring with the stopper still in and (b) that people collect them to make front-door curtains, like the one the owner of a movie on the Rue CHAMPOLLION made last year, but with plain ones, and pointed out to me: "It takes a lot of drinking to make a curtain like this."† (Nos. 34e, 49, 57, 67.)

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

†During the final reading of the manuscript, while I am trying in vain to write how intrigued I was to learn that other brands of wine are now using marble-colored stoppers or caps stamped with numbers and letters of the alphabet, MARIANNE and MICHÈLE RICARD are talking about pink mattresses, square ones, blue-gray, flowered—proof enough that I absolutely must end this topography, something I have been saying for weeks †† without result.

AUTHOR'S RECENT NOTE

†† For years.

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26
Small aluminum spoon

a real bargain, bought at the drugstore on Rue LACÉPÈDE opposite the Hotel Beau Séjour, where MADAME MARABELLE claims that someone is tapping her gas and threatens to write the city gas company about it. On the spoon, remains of egg yolk (Nos. 1, 2, 4, 4a).

30
Glazed earthenware bowl

yellow outside, white inside, half full of Nescafé (No. 6) served to the American Negro composer BENJAMIN PATTERSON, *Tr. Note 1*, (author of a score for bass violin in which the instrument emits sounds by the removal of objects inserted between the strings and elsewhere) who paid me a visit during breakfast (No. 1) and who, learning that BREMER was returning to Switzerland by car, decided then and there to take advantage of the opportunity and accompany him as far as Brussels, thinking it would be easier to hitchhike from there to Cologne to pick up his bass and bring it to Paris. (BREMER asked

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him to do a performance at the Municipal Theater in Bern next February as part of a program he was preparing in which the public would participate, details of which they were to discuss in BREMER'S CITROËN 2CV.)†

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 1

To my knowledge, my only namesake is the son of BENJAMIN PATTERSON, EVERETT EMMETT PATTERSON. I have not yet met him. I was baptized OSCAR EMMETT WILLIAMS, and for many years was known as OSCAR, but so many people mistook me for OSCAR WILLIAMS the anthologist that I decided to use EMMETT instead of OSCAR. The mother of my dear and longtime friend SHARON SCIAMA, KAY BOYLE, almost refused to come downstairs to dinner before our first meeting, thinking that SHARON'S friend "OSCAR" must be the anthologist. And once my old KENYON College colleague ANTHONY HECHT, who had just seen POLLY and me off on the QUEEN ELIZABETH, received a telephone call, the dialogue of which ran something like this:

"Yes, this is ANTHONY HECHT."
"This is OSCAR WILLIAMS."
"Come on, now, I just put OSCAR and POLLY on the QUEEN ELISABETH."
"Is there more than one OSCAR WILLIAMS?"
"Why yes, I know several. ...Wait a minute. Is this..."

Yes, it was the anthologist. And through the years people introduced to me by those old friends who still call me OSCAR have often handed me manuscripts to be included in my next anthology. One of the more outspoken of them once took my hand and said: "I've always wanted to meet the poor man's DYLAN THOMAS."

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

† The program never took place, but I myself have since bought a CITROËN 2CV.

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32
Paring knife

with a black wooden handle and a very rusty blade, point broken off, bought for 3 francs and 40 centimes only a week ago along with two snail tongs at the cutlery shop at the foot of the Rue Mouffetard. I made this purchase because I liked the contrast between the long handle and the short blade, but without noticing that it wasn't stainless steel. The point was broken off the same day in trying to open clams, the most hermetically sealed of all shellfish. The only way KICHKA found to open them was to wait until they opened up slightly to breathe, then insert the blade rapidly, which took her the whole day. (If anyone knows a more efficient method, please write me.) †, ††

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AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

† DE LA VILLEGLÉ has since informed me that all one needs is an ordinary oyster knife, which costs about 1 franc. But the real revelation came with the introduction of a truly monstrous machine at the annual LÉPINE competition, *Tr. Note 1*, in 1962. It sells for about 35 francs, and here are excerpts from the prospectus:

> "Easy Oysters: for opening oysters of all sizes and varieties. Hurrah for Easy Oysters! Gone are your oyster-opening woes. No more cut hands, because the semi-automatic Easy Oysters machine opens the oysters for you. Easy Oysters consists of a base with a slot to insert the oyster, with adjustable clamps to hold the oyster in place. Easy Oysters comes with an adjustable hand-grip blade movable in all directions, and can be fastened to your table. Simply..."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 1

The "Concours LÉPINE" is an annual exposition in Paris where inventors and small manufacturers have shown off their wares since 1901. It derives its name from a former prefect of police, LOUIS LÉPINE (1846–1933). MARCEL DUCHAMP introduced his Rotoreliefs at the 1935 gathering—and wasn't able to sell a single set.

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

†† Note by ALAIN JOUFFROY: "For opening shellfish, and clams in particular, I can think of no one who would know how to do it better than PHILIPPE HIQUILY, whose work often puts one in mind of giant clams." *Tr. Note 2.*

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE 2

To "open clams" is one of the more colorful euphemisms for sexual intercourse. In this connection, as well as the author's search for the best instrument to open these hermetically sealed creatures, it is interesting to contemplate the giant West Indian clam which reaches a length of three feet and weighs up to twenty pounds.

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45
Pack of blue toilet paper

with interfolded sheets, trademarked Soundproof, † which makes me think of Kangaroo men's shorts and Eros†† deodorant cakes for toilets. Some of these cakes, presented as "erotic objects," were in the surprise package given to KICHKA'S SISTER for her birthday. (Nos. 2, 17, 22, 29, 63).†††

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

†FRANÇOIS DUFRÊNE (who helped correct the French manuscript of the re-anecdoted topography) called my attention to HANS ARP'S poem *Soundproof Blue* in the review *K*:

> "With incongruous borborygmus the wind discharges... I hasten. At last I penetrate the soundproof blue of nostalgia."
>
> (Meudon 1938)

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

†† EROS is also the family name of MARIE-LOUISE, a young Hungarian of the quarter, who wrote a book of prayers and in whose room I made the snare-picture "Birthday Breakfast With EROS" the morning of my 32nd anniversary.

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

†††The text of the topography going through my head, I was intrigued to learn that while soundproof toilet paper is only optional in Paris, it is obligatory for garbage cans to be (see the decree of the prefecture of police of the Seine Department of March 1962). I also found and bought another brand of toilet paper that considers the whole thing a Bagatelle (registered trademark, B&B, Paris); but the Catholic Church does not consider it a bagatelle, and made the manufacturer of another brand of paper, Adios, back down. I learned this from reading *Der Spiegel* (March 14, 1962) in an article titled "Blasphemy in Crepe." I asked *Der Spiegel* for permission to reprint excerpts from the article, which they very generously granted:

> The Catholic Church has compelled one of West Germany's richest firms to change its business tactics... Feldmühle, manufacturer of the old Servus paper, had decided to introduce "a modern toilet paper, fully hygienic, perfectly detachable, of fine crepe in pastel colors" at the attractive consumer price of 60 pfennigs. In view of the broadened touristic horizon of West Germans, advertising psychologists added to the name Servus, borrowed from Austria, the Spanish word Adios. Feldmühle launched Adios with a half-million-mark advertising campaign. In train compartments, on advertising pillars and match covers the firm confided: "Adios is better."

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The new product had hardly been put on sale when, toward the beginning of December, the Feldmühle telephone rang. On the other end of the line was DR. JOHANNES NEUHÄUSLER, suffragan bishop of Munich, energetically demanding a bit of information: "I've just learned that you are advertising a toilet paper called Adios. Didn't you realize what you were doing?"

In a letter to the firm NEUHÄUSLER protested against the use of Adios for toilet paper, because according to the man of GOD the word offends religious sentiments: Adios means "GOD be with you."

For fear that the Catholic clergy would call for a boycott from the pulpit, the directors called off the publicity campaign and an order went out to find another name acoustically similar to Adios that would not hurt religious feelings. Publicity writers came up with Arios, but almost immediately it was pointed out that this name, too, could insult the faithful. At the beginning of the 4th Century A.D. the Arian controversy, which traced its origin to the presbyter ARIUS of Alexandria, threw the Christian world into an uproar. Because ARIUS had been anathematized by the Council of Nicaea for his teachings—he denied the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son—Feldmühle's directors recoiled from the name Arios.

In their confusion the publicity men finally settled on Amios. But it was still not certain that the bishop would accept the new name. Amios recalls the Old Testament prophet AMOS who once warned against the inner corruption of men in times of economic prosperity. (*Tr. Note 1.*)

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Returning from the art talks in Vienna (see No. 66, translator's note), the author and I stopped off in Munich to visit SOPHIE VAN BEHRNEGENDANK of *Der Spiegel.* She gave us the key to a very comfortable apartment (equipped with TV, and across the street from where KANDINSKY's atelier used to stand) owned by friends of hers then on vacation. One morning, planning an outing, the three of us were unable to agree on a destination. To decide the matter, SPOERRI placed a large map of the Munich area on the floor, shut his eyes, and dropped a coin: where it landed, we would go. It landed on Dachau. At Dachau I bought a book describing the German Catholic Church's opposition to HITLER, and it was written by this very same suffragan bishop, who had been interned at Dachau during the Second World War.

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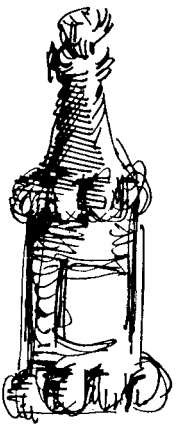

62
Bottle of Sauzé

eau de cologne for men, verbena scent, three-fourths full, around the neck a black bow KICHKA gave me the day I received an invitation† to the preview of the "Art of Assemblage" exhibition in New York which stated that guests had to wear black ties.†† I had remarked to KICHKA that since I didn't have one I wouldn't be able to go to New York.†††

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

† Text of the invitation:

The President and Trustees of The Museum of Modern Art
request the pleasure of your company
at the Contributing Members' Preview of the exhibition
the art of assemblage
on Monday evening, October 2 from 9–11:30 o'clock
Tickets are required for admission
R.S.V.P. 11 West 53 Street New York 19 Black tie

AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL NOTE

††After reading the manuscript, PIERRE RESTANY, theoretician of the New Realists, explained to me that "black tie" is the fashionable phrase for evening dress, that the tie can be black or white, which makes the immediate purchase of a black tie unnecessary.

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

††† I should point out that this exhibition was organized by WILLIAM C. SEITZ, who spoke to me about it in Amsterdam (No. 34d) during an agitated evening when we had had a lot to drink and I insulted him, for which I offer my apologies here. After the opening of my exhibition at Galerie LAWRENCE (Feb. 9 to March 7, 1962) SEITZ, passing through Paris, visited the gallery and, seeing one of my snare-pictures that caught his fancy, went against his principle of not collecting to the point of taking it off the wall himself and carrying it with him to the airport. He was unaware that this snare-picture—the top of a suitcase—had quite a story behind it. I told him all about it in my reply to his letter announcing the hanging of the picture:

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The Museum of Modern Art
New York 19

February 27, 1962

Dear DANIEL,
Just a word to tell you that the frying pans, etc., are now hanging on my wall and look great.

With best regards,
BILL
(WILLIAM C. SEITZ)
Associate Curator

WCS:jks

Paris, March 17, 1962

Dear BILL
Just a word to tell you that the letter, etc., is now in my pocket and feels great.

With best regards,
DANIEL
(DANIEL I. SPOERRI)

P.S. It might interest you to know the story of the suitcase top. I was invited by an awful modernistic architect to participate in an exhibition he had arranged at his house in Cologne... A few years ago, when I was going around Europe exhibiting the Edition MAT (multiplied art objects) I always wanted to be able to carry all the works of the artists in one suitcase. Once I even asked some of them to make their work small enough to fit into a suitcase. So on this new occasion... I took up the idea again, and I asked ARMAN, CÉSAR, DESCHAMPS, DUFRÊNE, HAINS, RAYSSE, NIKI DE ST.-PHALLE, TINGUELY and DE LA VILLEGLÉ to participate with me in a suitcase exhibition. I made use of an old suitcase of mine that I was then using as a kind of table; the snare-picture that you bought is the top of this suitcase. By chance, a young gallery owner from Cologne—HARO LAUHUS—came to see me the same week I was working on the suitcase, and proposed an exhibition at his gallery, to follow the first performance at the architect's house. So I went. BOB RAUSCHENBERG, who was at that time also in Paris, offered to participate in the exhibit, then said the only thing he'd like to do was furnish a padlock to lock the suitcase with, and to throw the key away. And I did it. It was rather difficult to cross the Franco-German border with my locked suitcase, but I succeeded in explaining to the customs officials that I was an illusionist, and that I couldn't open the suitcase without ruining my whole act—and from the way the top of the suitcase looked, they were ready to believe me... I arrived, with my suitcase, at the house of the architect as scheduled (June 10, 1961). About 200 people were there, including DAVID TUDOR. The architect asked me not to take more than ten minutes, but I think the whole performance lasted about an hour and a half. First I had to saw the padlock, then I hung all the things on the wall, explaining irrelevant things about each artist and his work. NIKI had given me sugar candy to distribute to the public, TINGUELY asked me to blow soap bubbles, GHÉRASIM LUCA made a poem that I handed out, DUFRÊNE screamed a few lettrist poems on a tape, we shot at one of NIKI's pictures, two sculptures of TINGUELY had to be mounted together (they were attached to the suitcase), and so on. Anyway, I succeeded in what I wanted to do... Next evening was the vernissage at the gallery. ...And that's the story about the Blue GILLETTE Blade.

P.P.S. For the sake of exactness, I inform you that ROBERT FILLIOU has since made an even smaller exhibit. He carries small "works of art" in his cap, over his head, through the streets. He calls cap and contents "The Legitimate Gallery."††††

††††This Legitimate Gallery also has a history. The idea was born during a tumultuous evening at the sumptuous seaside villa of AAGARD ANDERSEN near Helsingør where we drank a great deal, and where FILLIOU insulted MESDAMES ANDERSEN and HALLINGKOCH, for which I

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don't know if he has been pardoned. In any case, during dinner he got the idea of starting a wheelbarrow gallery in Paris, where he was returning soon because of his expulsion from Denmark. Everybody present—TINGUELY, NIKI DE ST.-PHALLE, ADDI and TUT KOEPCKE, the ANDERSENS, the HALLING-KOCHS, the USSINGS and I—was bowled over by the idea and, convulsed with laughter, made preposterous suggestions, which FILLIOU took seriously. And to prove to us that he was serious, the following day he sent TINGUELY this letter:

Dear TINGUELY,

Pursuant to our conversation of last evening, I confirm that the *vernissage* of the Legitimate Gallery will take place during the month of October (or as soon as possible) with an exhibition of your work. The Legitimate Gallery is itinerant. It consists of a wheelbarrow or pushcart, according to need. It travels (legitimately) through the street, in the highest creative tradition. Upon receipt of your works, I promise to maintain them in good condition, respect your prices, and to follow an itinerary to be worked out with you. My commission will consist of the usual 33 per cent.

On your part, you will contribute to the launching of the gallery by sending out invitations to your exhibition, and taking care of publicity (press, television, collectors).

The Legitimate Gallery will open as soon as legal formalities are arranged. If the price of the license surpasses my means, you will be expected to advance me the money, to be deducted from my commission.

In exchange for your assistance in launching the gallery, I promise to exhibit your "legitimate works" whenever you express the desire, in Paris as well as in the provinces and abroad (I intend to take the gallery to such cities as Brasilia, Tokyo, New York, Moscow, Peking, etc.), respecting, of course, contracts with other artists (NIKI DE ST.-PHALLE and DANIEL SPOERRI have already given their consent). Your confirmation of receipt of this letter will serve as our bond of agreement.

So long,
R. FILLIOU

Incidentally, I would like to quote the song FILLIOU sang, completely soused, to the tune of the COLONEL BOGEY March the rest of the evening, almost bursting our eardrums:

GOERING has only got one ball
HITLER has got them very small
HIMMLER
Is very similar
And poor old GOEBBELS has no balls at all

explaining each time that only the English could call their worst enemy "poor old GOEBBELS" and that's why they won the war.

To conclude the history of the gallery: FILLIOU was not able to get a license from the city of Paris, so he decided to reduce the dimensions of the Legitimate Gallery and carry it around on his head without a license. Thus the Legitimate Gallery turned out to be an illegitimate gallery.

I myself was so drunk that evening that I'm certain it was there I infected my finger and not in the door of a taxi, as I once supposed: after two days the infection had spread almost up to my shoulder, and I was sent to a doctor: if I had come two days later, he said, I probably would have died of blood poisoning. I don't know how the art critics of Copenhagen got wind of the infection, but EINAR JOHANNSEN, the best known of them according to MARIANNE (anyway, he writes in the best paper, *Information*), said of me in an article dated Tuesday, Oct. 10, 1961: "He recently exhibited in Copenhagen, where he walked around with a serious blood infection that frightened his acquaintances."

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78
Magic Marker
black ink. The pictures exhibited at Galerie KOEPCKE (No. 6) in Copenhagen were signed with it. I found it there, in the apartment of FILLIOU, who helped me write this text in French because I was born March 27, 1930, in Galati, Romania, and he was born Jan. 17, 1926, at Sauve (Gard).†

AUTHOR'S ADDITIONAL NOTE

†Thinking it might be diverting to review the facts of my life up to the present, I asked ROBERT FILLIOU to write my biography from details MICHÈLE RICARD (see No. 25, note †) received from my mouth:

DANIEL was born DANIEL ISAAC FEINSTEIN March 27, 1930, at Galati, a Romanian port on the Danube. He lived there until he was 12. His father, a Jew converted to Protestantism, had founded a mission there to convert other Jews. After his death at the hands of the Germans in 1941, the family fled to Switzerland, where DANIEL was adopted by his maternal uncle, PROF. DR. DR. H.C. DR. H.C. THEOPHIL SPOERRI, rector of the University of Zurich. He was a bad student, and was apprenticed to an import house. He stole large quantities of postage stamps and was dismissed. He became an apprentice bookseller in a bookstore that also sold stuffed animals. He stole a mounted frog and was dismissed again, which pleased him because, recently converted, he had decided to become a missionary in Tibet. But he lost his faith after reading COUÉ's "Autosuggestion" at a model farm where he had been apprenticed while waiting to enter missionary school. He left the farm and headed for Basel where his family enrolled him in a commercial school. He was thrown out because he spent his time reading poetry (especially RILKE, HOFMANNSTHAL and STEFAN GEORGE). After that he lived alone, without a regular job, under the surveillance of the minors' control board, from whom he escaped many times during trips to Amsterdam, Paris and Marseille. He stole fruit on the street, hired out as an unskilled laborer, waited tables at a café, and wrote poetry until all his manuscripts were stolen while he was sleeping under a bridge of the Seine, then stopped writing poetry altogether. He studied photography, but not for long. Then he started dancing nights in a Zurich jazz cellar, and shortly afterwards entered a school of classical dance, which he attended more or less regularly for two years. In 1952 he was in Paris studying classical dance with PREOBRAJENSKA and mime with DECROUX. He guided tourists around Paris and escorted pilgrims to Lourdes. In Paris he renewed his acquaintance with TINGUELY, whom he had known in Basel. Together they conceived a color ballet with mobile decor, which collapsed the day of the final rehearsal. In 1954 he was first dancer at the Bern Opera. He staged several avant-garde plays ("The Bald Soprano" and "The Lesson" of IONESCO, PICASSO's "Desire Trapped by the Tail" and works of TARDIEU, BECKETT and TZARA). He taught mime and jazz choreography, and directed several studies for the experimental theater. In 1957 he became an assistant to GUSTAV RUDOLF SELLNER at the Landestheater in Darmstadt, Germany. He took part in the movement exhibition at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp, where he exhibited a wood sculpture transformable by the chance participation of spectators, and, with the help of TINGUELY, the Autotheater, which turned the spectators into actors. This was in 1958, after he had published a series of articles with CLAUS BREMER on experimental theater. In 1959 he left Darmstadt and went to Paris with VERA. The rest is in the topography.

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THE GREECE POEM

The margin of mountain grass moved from our feet
down
        the apron of
a few sheep at the edge of the world
jumping up and down
stamping on the highway
to keep warm we drew the senses
of every sheep in that field
        the goats
bells clattered
we stood there
waiting for a ride, children
hardly clothed followed us
out of town, asking germania?
swiss french german australian beat it ah
    fuck off
said we,
            the town closed down their
lights went off singly
in pairs
the children trotted back to town in pairs like dogs
hardly clothed
for that kind of night we shook
by the highway
lonely to be there,

a pontiac passed us
    and never stopped
its horn
insisting
we move out or be
    as the goats might
    or those children, another stain
    explained to police in mufti
    another dollar, easily
    floated greece

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it was, the fleet carrier in harbor
like ajax in arms
in piraeus there were ensigns
that summer the heat
of the city was terrible and the white
dust
    behind the mountain
houses, and that stone
they use for building

the dark interior houses
where the wails
    the rags
we heard behind walls
the cats clamoring all night the balcony
our light like a fleet dog
swept it, our water
thrown there those possessives
carried it off
the noise
        of their music
did we sleep then no
tho we so loved the music there, no

the rock and roll
of thalassa the great
sea noise interferes
its bulk into eartha kitt
and mantovani we heard
through speakers lifted above the sand
and the cars and soaps
and coca cola and clothes
of athens are say chicago 1955
    even the *fish*
chicken o' the sea...
                No
exploration of the feet
or air is possible those

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are our commodities like
the grand canyon
whose vistas when mules
and ladies looked and wives
of marines in rickshaws
and whether we make our wars
from okinawa, or saigon
is easier, all
of it belongs to us?
to move on the earth
our copyright? and is
our odyssey foot loose
in the back of taxis
o look at the meter quick
or the fare of defenders of the west
leaps with each coinage of policy

is that why they charge
say, 50% for grievance tax
you out of hand
clothes
even

buy you things
with that look of money
new
in their eyes
how marvelous, fish
and beer
by the aegean
record players in their cars
and the children
chased us out of town
like thucidides
would have recorded it how
full of logic
the lonely
should have to be *run* out

—THOMAS CLARK

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from

Langrishe, Go Down

Aidan Higgins

At last Helen rose and began to dress herself, selecting for the day a fawn outfit. She pulled on her wellingtons and stowed away her town clothes in the wardrobe. Then she went to the window and drew up the Venetian blind. Looking out she saw clouds passing in a leisurely way over the hills. Cattle wandered across Mangan's long field, breathing out vapours into the freezing air. All was as it had always been, variations apart (the passing of her parents, the death of Emily), in the immutable order of events. She left the bedroom, stepping down onto the cold landing.

In the bathroom she ran water into the washbasin, dabbing water over her cheeks and eyes, which refreshed her a little. Then she dried her face and hands, put the towel away, found a comb. With the greatest care she began combing. Long white strands came away in the teeth. The washbasin was covered with them, hers and other darker strands from Imogen's head. Lily was moulting too, but she combed her hair near the window, at father's shaving mirror, and it came out there. Helen had held onto her teeth for as long as possible, until they too had to go; and now her hair, at one time so thick and lustrous, was coming out in fistfuls. Soon they would all be bald as old men, sitting around the fire at night, holy shows. From the window she could see the overgrown

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tennis-court and the high beech hedge along which Emily had trodden her path, and the dark knotty branches in the orchard beyond, so still. She left the bathroom, walking on linoleum, descended onto the main stairs. Where the banisters turned at right angles, leading to the main bedrooms, she turned away, stopping outside a door. She rapped on the door of the small spare room into which Imogen had recently moved. Silence of the grave. Helen knocked again, louder.

—Come in, a muffled voice said at last.

She turned the handle and went in. The blind was drawn and the little room suffused with amethyst light, in which dust motes floated, sinking and rising. It was a narrow place with an alcove, shelves reaching from floor to ceiling on either side of the shallow fireplace; a table standing on one leg came out from the wall. One-third of the remaining floor space was occupied by a low bed over the end rail of which Imogen had thrown her clothes. Some empty stout bottles stood on the table and the room was permeated with the sickly sweetish smell of Guinness' porter. Helen stood on the faded mat, looking down on the dire confusion of the bed.

—Come up, Imogen, I must talk to you.

A disturbance of springs and squeaking castors began; then the bedclothes were pushed aside and Imogen's head appeared. Helen looked at her.

—What ails you? she said.

Imogen struggled up until her head and shoulders were free. She wore a loose shapeless brown cardigan with the stitching gone along one arm.

—Nothing *ails* me, she said in a peevish way. Why?

—You don't look so well.

Imogen drew the sheets that were none too clean up to her chin, staring down the bed.

—Do I ever look well? she said. I didn't sleep very well last night, that's all.

Helen seated herself on the edge of the bed. She wanted to say, You drink too much. Have you no dignity? She said:

—It makes all the difference to me (bowing her head), a good night's rest.

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Imogen closed her eyes and began passing her hand over her face, clearing away cobwebs.

—I was having a bad dream. I remember some of it.

Silence. She lay between the greyish sheets, eyes shut.

—Such a strange dream, Imogen said, passing her hand across her face several times. I dreamt that Christ's body was discovered in the Ural Mountains outside a town called Vlannick, which I don't suppose exists. But later on in the dream it was me they had unearthed. I mean I was Him, two thousand years buried under the earth. What could that mean, do you suppose? Are you any good at interpreting dreams?

—No, Helen said.

What sort of nonsense was that anyway? Christ; Russia; the Urals; bugbears and old maid's fancies.

At last Imogen heaved a heavy sigh and said:

—I think I'll just stay where I am for the time being. My stomach feels out of order today.

Well, God knows that was nothing new. All her life long she had been complaining about the state of her health in the same long-suffering voice, slurring her words, swallowing vowels, whole sentences trailing off into silence. She was beyond cure with her stomach cramps, her sick headaches, bodily fatigues, liver, kidneys, stones.

—Could I bring you anything? Helen said, avoiding her sister's eyes.

Imogen gave a wan smile, shaking her head. No thanks, really. She would try to sleep a little longer. She had no appetite, lived on very thin vegetarian omelettes sprinkled with parsley and apples with no pith which she cooked on a tin lid, the centres scooped out and filled with brown sugar.

And who feeds the unfortunate hens, pray? Helen thought. Or had they too grown accustomed to irregular hours of feeding?

After a further silence she said:

—I was thinking of visiting Donycomper today. It's after the anniversary. Someone should go.

Imogen stared at the ceiling over the door without saying anything. Breathing through her nose, adenoidal, she lowered

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her eyes until they were focussed on the clothes thrown over the bedrail.

—How would you go?

—On my bike, Helen said.

Silence.

—Why not? Imogen said at last.

Helen turned away. Her sister's battered shoes were arranged toe to toe by the bed. Her hazel stick was in the corner. She had her active and passive days. Yesterday she had been out marching. Winter was a hard time for her; then it took her ages to get up out of bed. She claimed that she was not such a morning bird, that she was brighter at night, which was debatable. It was painful to watch her getting out of bed. First one foot was slithered out to have its brown lisle stocking fixed to the arched toe, then rolled up to the calf, drawn smartly in and drawn up her thigh under the bedclothes. Half an hour might pass before the second leg emerged, just as white and corroded with goose pimples as the first, to have its stocking fixed on the arched toes, and be drawn quickly in again. Then a long pause while she collected herself together, assembled her forces for the daily struggle, staring up at the ceiling with the light of human intelligence nowhere evident in the fixed stare of the eye.

At long last the bedclothes would be slipped aside and Imogen would emerge, fully dressed save for her shoes, which she immediately put her feet into. She had a little touch of natural colour on her cheeks. An old love had put it there. The memory of past obscenities gave her that rose glow on sallow cheeks, when she was old.

—Excuse me, Imogen said, making as if to rise, I must pay a call.

Helen did not wait, but crossed to the door, letting herself out. Halfway down the stairs she remembered: hadn't she called on Imogen expressly to tell her something, ask her something? Yes, but what? For the life of her she could not remember. Her memory was playing her tricks. Was it something about the sale of the house, or something about the will, or what? She could not remember. No matter, it would

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come back to her. She went on down the main stairway into the hall.

It was three-twenty-five and a dull cold day over the townland of Ballymakealy Upper, which is in the Parish of Killadoon, which is in the diocese of Celbridge, which is in the Barony of Salt, which is in the County Kildare, which is in the province of Leinster.

In Helen's room the Venetian blinds were half-drawn, the bed unmade, and two mangy dispirited-looking cats stared at her from the bed, while a third was licking something from a plate balanced precariously on some books on the desk. When this animal saw Imogen coming it jumped down and glided away.

She crossed to the window and drew up the blind a foot or more, admitting more light on the writing desk, then seated herself at it. Sheets of paper heavily scored and corrected in her sister's slipshod hand lay there and a book which Helen had lately been reading, open with a marker between the leaves. Bending, Imogen read: "then our long drive through Drumlanrig woods, with much talk from her (careless of the shower that fell, battering on our hood and apron); in spite of my habitual dispiritment, and helpless gloom all that summer, I too was cheered for the time. And then the dinner itself, and the bustling rustic company, all this, too, was saved by her, who turned it into something..."

Imogen stopped, pushed the book away. She tried to memorize the position of the objects on the desk, one in relation to another, before she began her inspection; then abruptly pulled open a drawer by her right hand.

Photographs, brown with age, face up. She took them out; four. The first showed a mine shaft rising above a hill upon which grew sparse scrub. There was a hut in the foreground, and before it a young man with a boater hat under his arm stared from the picture. Above him there was an inked cross on the print. The second showed a very plain housemaid

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clasping her hands to her abdomen on a flat rooftop. Her hair, parted in the middle, was frizzed up; she affected a white flower at the crown; her ears protruded, she had heavy eyebrows, her face excessively powdered, and she had the heavy slumberous loose Langrishe jaw. Her eyes, perhaps out of diffidence, were half closed. She looked like a man dressed up. The third photograph showed a boxer in a gymnasium, stripped for action, presenting his admirable profile to the photographer and his long reach to an unseen opponent. His dark hair was sleeked down, he wore a pair of shorts, tennis shoes, dark socks—an object of admiration to a number of heavily bustled ladies standing in edifying poses along the wall of the gym, below the Stars and Stripes, the Yale pennant and other unidentified insignia. On this print, on either side of the boxer's legs, was written in ink: *Jimmy Britt?* The last picture showed the rail tracks of the mine, the same precisely as in the first photograph, but now leading towards a narrow tunnel in the centre of the scrub-covered hill. The boater-hatted young man was posed before the tunnel, resting one foot on an item of rolling stock, leaning forward, chin in hand, pensively regarding the camera. He had the soft, dapper, well-bred appearance of a young gentleman of leisure.

Imogen put her hand back into the drawer and drew out a document which when unrolled revealed itself as a share certificate impressed in gold leaf, with a dark green torch shooting forth static green flames, over which was printed in black lettering the legend

LANGRISHE CONSOLIDATED
MINING COMPANY

Issued to Robert Langrishe, dated September 24th a good few years past. She spread it out. The centre sheet was watermarked in gold, stamped with a beaten gold seal upon which was embossed the title, *Langrishe Consolidated Mining Company, Arizona*, and in the middle of the seal, *Incorporated 1915*. It was a certificate for 3,720 shares of capital stock, fully paid and non-assessable, transferable only on the books of the Corpora -

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tion by the holder in person or by Attorney upon surrender of the certificate, properly endorsed. A fanciful illustration showed the mine workings, the narrow gauge railway, the shaft and sundry cooling towers belching smoke, the whole set among mountainous scenery. Par value ten cents. Incorporated under the laws of the State of Arizona. Serial number 93. Imogen put it away.

She thrust in her hand again; and this time brought out to her surprise something she had not seen before. A single carbon copy of a sheet of typescript, torn down the centre in an irregular line, the left half of which was missing. She put on her spectacles to read.

non
moment ago was; if you were aware
present or other examinations
or made you waver in your opinion,
e? No, you wouldn't.
ay, you can exaggerate sweating
s a far more important factor
sweating at one examination
erent things,—what the frame of the
t, whether she was nervous at that
mean the woman was full up after

e state of her nerves? It might.
ve a neurotic case without any of
s? Yes, it could.
it may be held to you, when these
you know the woman's full history
before? I don't know what you
tory because she gave me details
d past history since childhood.
patient for numerous years would it
be a help?
Delaney who knew her for close

ient. His evidence was that he met
accident but never beforehand

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ing her as a patient, I suggest to you
her as a woman for twenty years and
ion to judge her genuineness than you
e.
examination of her? I had two
to to my satisfaction.
think I could decide in that time

Imogen read this through twice; but it yielded up nothing. She could make nothing of it. She replaced it in the drawer which she then closed. With a steady hand she pulled out another drawer, the contents of which were already familiar to her, and took from the back a bundle of letters tied together, addressed to a Herr Otto Beck at a Munich address. They were in her own handwriting. She untied the bundle. A folded sheet of lined notepaper lay on top, and this she opened out. On it was written: "This parcel of letters relates to the two happiest years of my long and insignificant existence, although those years were accompanied by uncertainty, and by the absence of anything that could constitute present happiness." The tone was pure Mary Berry, although the handwriting was her own, when she was thirty-nine. She put it aside. The only letter he had ever written to her was there, addressed to Springfield with a Dublin postmark. He had been engaged in tutoring, earning a little money, staying with some people in Pembroke Road, Dublin. She opened the letter. The hand was unforgettable: angular, bold, the n's and w's were gates being trampled down, each imperious line dashed down almost on top of the previous one. She read: "Today I amused myself watching the kangaroos at the Zoo. They are such strange creatures. The mother had her young with her, which kept coming in and out of the pouch. They have an awkward fashion of courtship. The buck hobbles along next to the chosen female in such a manner that the head and upper body seem insignificant, they look like big grey wagon wheels rolling slowly and deliberately over bumpy ground, next to the rabbit-shape of the female, who appears to be indifferent to them. But alert all the same, ears cocked. A truly prehistoric scene of fornication in its slowness and cumbersome-

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ness. I have often considered..."

She stopped reading, laid the letter open on the desk, smoothing out its creases with the palm of her hand and stared at the wall before her. Today I amused myself.

After a while she folded the letter neatly again, replaced it in its envelope, thrust it back with the others. Scheming, schemer... the letters in a certain way arranged, as if casually... Traps, all traps. She's sly. She took out some of her own letters. They never reached the Munich address, at least Helen had saved her that. One day she had put them away in a certain place, in a curtain, where Helen had come upon them, read and appropriated them without saying a word. Imogen took one out and read: "What's travelling like? Are you tired of it, or is the capacity for novelty worn out before the things are?" Had she written that? How many years ago? Had she been happy then? The hot days of the long dry spell; the so-called dog days. Otto seated on a kitchen chair inside the cottage door in the evening sun, smoking his pipe, in shirt sleeves, collarless, dreaming of something. Otto on his knees sowing seeds in the wet beds behind the cottage. There was a man of double deed, sowed his garden full of seed. She had brought cuttings from Springfield garden. Lupins, bell-flowers, balm of gilead, blue spirea, cupid's dart, snow-in-summer. He had touched her behind that first night on the avenue; had drawn close to her affections by stealth. She read: "I am no good without you. I have been so terribly lonely. It is my dearest wish... My own dearest, I feel how uncertain I am without you. Tonight I sit here and can do nothing except mope and drink gin. There is so little now-a-days. Not that there is so little really, but so much of one closes up—I mean me. I listen to Helen and her world is so small and narrow, the world that she calls art. Of course she doesn't talk an awful lot to me, as I am one of the subintelligents. I've been reading, would you believe it, *The Wings of a Dove*. I find much of it badly written, or rather not written well enough; a man trying to describe shades of feeling beyond his range of expression. If only he had Proust at his elbow. Would that be right?"

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She read to the end of the letter and put it back in its envelope; drew out another one, opened it:

"...I've not been too well... but no further sign of trouble from that quarter, or any other part of me... I wondered if my little indisposition had been a bit of..." She read on a little further. And then.

"I still think the only cure for living is drinking. No, I am quite serious. Why else is it that ideas become so very much clearer when you've had a drink? Is it because the shambles of life falls into the background or what? It must be very simple. After all the animal traits become clearer, why not the mind also?"

The animal traits become clearer. Imogen read on through the four-page letter, depressed by its assumptions. She had been parading herself a little, trying to impress him. It wouldn't have worked. Not with him. She read: "What do you think, is the world big or is the world small? I myself have become very small; tight and dull and even immune to my own meaner moods. It's the old oppression I knew would creep up on me. And then to have the energy to throw it off—well, I just haven't got it."

She read to the end; selected another; read:

"Just to be on my bicycle again on a long clear evening. It's years since I've made use of an early summer evening. But now I find it impossible to fully enjoy anything. I say 'now' and that's a laugh—as if at any other time it had been otherwise. For even before there was always something to upset the happiness we had. Some foolishness or some quarrel; only this time I was in the future. The roads were the same, the hills the same, but my eyes and my heart are two different things and between them they give me no peace, all the misery of the world staring out of my eyes, something that is an essential part of me, I cannot escape it. What can I do? 'Come to terms'—that doesn't mean anything. It sounds as bad as 'Know thyself' and all that rubbish. The only things that help are thunderstorms or very strong winds that blow on one. The sun is no good, for it opens everything out. I want to remain closed."

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She went on reading. The memory of things—are they better than the things themselves? It had grown dark outside, and the light coming through the window hardly sufficed for her to see by. After a while she got up, adjusted the blind to its former level, moved her chair in close by the wall, took from the mantelpiece Helen's spare bicycle lamp, reseated herself, turned it on. It cast a feeble enough light, but sufficient. Helen returning would not notice it from below. Imogen selected another letter.

"I have gained a stone in weight. It is very obvious, as I bulge all over the place, but feel very comfortable...

"Days are passing and I am getting more and more anxious. Weeks, months, years could go by. My dearest sweetheart, my life, do not think of me, if you think... think unkindly or say that ever on this earth... and then I would gladly... but feeling so guilty that I don't know. I might convince myself that it was too late, better to turn back forget that it had ever... so that I am sending you... I who am in no position, to say the least of it... well, is that asking too much? (She read rapidly, skipping words, phrases, her elbows on the table, hands at her temples, her head close to the indiscreet scrawl.) I sometimes wonder... try to be frank, trying to be honest, but whether there could be meaning in it, that's another matter... There is a river near Parthenay called the Thouet... so how is one... or did you perhaps mean something else? Oh my dearest love bring me to Chapelizod again and we will... destroy the happiness we had..."

She read down to *and if you are free.*

She felt something painful stirring in her, behind her ribs, for an instant knew its timid pressure. A younger Imogen, not heart-whole, dressed in organdie and with bare arms, beckoned. She did not offer to read on, but remained sitting in the darkened room, her eyes closed. Destroy the happiness we had. She had tried to keep it, sustain it at maximum force; but it had left her. Below a bicycle passed slowly on the gravel. Helen was back.

She folded the four pages, thrust them in their envelope, took the bundle of letters securing them with two rubber

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bands and pushed them back into the drawer, closed it, got to her feet, turned over the cushion, re-arranged the objects on the desk so that it looked now just as she had found it, more or less the same disorder prevailing. The sound of a drawer clicking shut in a darkened room. A woman rising hastily, thrusting away documents. Imogen hurried, lamp in hand, to the door, opened it, extinguishing the light.

Through the low window on the landing another faint light was advancing towards the side door. It shone over the covered tank. Helen was already in the yard. She would have to move quickly. Moving back into the room, where a faint light came through the window, she went forward until her outstretched hand encountered the mantelpiece. No time now for finesse, no putting it back exactly where she had found it. Helen could think what she liked, think that it was the cats. She thrust the lamp in among other unidentified objects and moved back towards the door, advancing crablike, her right hand outstretched before her, leading with her right foot—one step forward, then bringing up the left foot, heel to heel with the right foot, then the right foot forward again, the left foot brought up, heel to heel, and so on until her hand met the cold surface of the wall. The open door was to the left. She found it when her hand went through the opening. She stood on the step in total darkness. There was no light in the yard. Helen was putting her bicycle away.

She could see nothing in front of her, only pitch darkness. The landing, the lavatory door opposite, the near window overlooking the yard, which could have guided her steps, had a little light come through, all lay in utter darkness. She might fall and break her neck on the stairs. She must go back and take Helen's lamp again in order to get down.

She turned, groping her way back, three, four slow blind steps. Until there it was again, the hard edge of projecting cast-iron. She introduced her hand with some guile, ultra-careful, among miscellaneous objects, jars, toiletries, useless things, fumbled for it; anticipating it before she found it, a certain shape, shallow black tin cold to the touch, minor protuberances of flanged cup and milled edge; in a word, the

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precise shape she could recognise, by touching.

Close to, close enough for her to fancy the still air disturbed by the softly shuttling motion of its pendulum, a measured, resonant, liquid-sounding stroke announced the presence, close to her face, of a good-sized clock. In the dark it sounded loud. You'll never find it. Breathing hard, she thrust her hand here and there among the vanities on the mantelpiece. An unidentified object, evading her nervous grasp, fell, and was shattered to bits in the grate.

She listened, straining her ears. Silence. Nothing. With a shaky hand she tried again. This time she found something likely. It was it. Her fingers quickly imprisoned it as the door below opened with a familiar dragging of its hinge.

She lost her head completely then. The object she had in her hand was not a lamp, no such thing, only a hairbrush. She had forgotten on which side of the clock she had left the accursed thing, and in any case would never find it in the dark. She thrust her hands here and there, breathing fast. Additional objects rained down. She was beginning to doubt seriously whether she had left it there at all, when she found it. Snatching it up she made for the door, had the lamp working, and was through. Helen bolted the door below leading into the yard, and advanced along the flagged passageway. Imogen advanced on tip-toe on squeaking linoleum above her. At the end of the landing, on the wall, light flooded from the lamplit hall below. She went down four steps, crossed to the carpeted main stairway, and fled up towards her room, just as Helen, tired out from her expedition, set foot to the lower stairs.

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WHO WAS MARY SHELLEY

Who was Mary Shelley?
What was her name
before she married?

She eloped with Shelley,
she rode a donkey
till the donkey had to be carried.

Mary was Frankenstein's creator
his yellow eye
before her husband was to drown.

Created Frankenstein nights
after Byron, Shelley
talked the candle down.

Who was Mary Shelley?
She read Latin, Greek, Italian.
She bore a child

who died
and yet another child
who died.

—LORINE NIEDECKER

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Max Finstein: Two Poems

TO PRAISE A COMMON VEGETABLE

the question you asked
in the center of the world we were making

to prove the splendor of the breathing of being
—was about cauliflower.

See that great white heart/heat
fringed with green
you good!
good!
i said, 'my earth!'

and we miss more than we see.
one line at a time
a line is a horizon

a brink,
which is not, necessarily
an end.

THE PANHANDLE, ENCHANTED

sun is first coming through the eucalyptus early morning

a grove of sacred trees, grass glowing all 'round them one side cars
going up other side cars going down.

early morning. separated from each other a hundred yards, two young
girls, seated, legs crossed under them
heads lifted to the small sun rays

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eyes closed, not a move do they make.
cars rushing up on one side down on the other, i walk past them, they
do not move. the one nearest me her
face is lighted by the sun she is transfigured
i don't approach though i want to, i don't want to be an apparition
though i wish i could, somehow, share it with her.

---

complainte de l'oubli des morts

... man the dead
is in the boneyard
they don't get around
much anymore.
J. Laforgue

In a loft facing a parking lot
on a main drag of the tired
southend, lives my friend
the fellow artist stumbling thru
dope-filled mornings he's
not ready for:
dried-up paint pots, brushes
stiff'ning by has managed
(Mercury, 'by nite') to avoid the eight to five
he produces us no pictures

•

Outside ghosts ply the streets
ring door bells where no one's home
winos w/eyes for nickles & dimes
children like vomit rail
at the street corners the sharps
& flats of their vagrancy
crumpled bags brown and
white emerge from the rooming
houses and disappear
around corners that indicate
nothing

—STEVE JONAS

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One's Ship

Barton Midwood

I am up to my calves in the sea, the very beginnings of the sea which stretches before me out to the edge of the sky. My ship, my tiny ship moored in the shallows, rocks back and forth anxiously, like a schoolboy. The waves lap at its side, the cool waters. Ah, let us go, let us set forth, my ship!

But I am detained. All the women have gathered on the beachhead. We must deal with them, my ship and I. All want to make passage with us. They are shrieking, moaning, imploring. Each woman presents a plaintive convincing case. Each, it is clear from their arguments, deserves beyond the shadow of a doubt to accompany me. They love me, they say. Of course! I am irresistible. My rudder is golden, my sails ample, I have shapely legs. On the beach, with the wind blowing in my thin hair, I make an appealing picture. I am the captain of a noble craft, of everything in fact in sight. I am the only man for miles around. I am needed, that's clear.

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But how should I take them all, these lovely creatures? There is room for but one companion and frankly I am loath to take anyone beside myself. I am selfish, utterly. The wind blows in my hair. I turn to them and raise my arms for silence. I shall speak. A hush falls. All eyes grow round and soft and fix me tenderly. The tears flow. It is touching. The back of my shirt bellies like a sail.

"Ladies," I say, "I should like to speak to you individually. Form a line!"

They fight for first place. They pull one another's hair. They make an undignified spectacle. At last, however, they are in single file, a long line that runs back from the shore, across the beach, out to the road, and... to the ends of the earth for all I know. Nevertheless, I shall give them audience, each one. I must be fair!

I bid the first come forward.

"Yvonne!" I cry. "Come here, my dear. I love you passionately. Let me touch you."

I caress her thighs, she throws her arms around my neck, and we kiss so unconscionably long and hard that we fall to the ground and roll in the sand. We have no regard. One forgets oneself. There is nothing to be done.

"Have no fear," I whisper as we stand up and brush the sand from our mouths. "You are the one. I shall take you with me."

She kisses me lightly on the forehead, holding my face in her hands and standing just on her toes. Then she retires to a shady spot beneath a palm and waits, contentedly. From her purse she takes an orange and sucks it. She stares at me over it from under lowered loving brows.

"Next!"

Elsa steps forward. She runs at me, leaps into the air, locking her legs around my waist, wraps her arms around my neck, those slender tan arms with the light down, and kisses me precisely on the lips.

"You are the one," I whisper. "Have no fear."

She too retires to a palm and sucks an orange. They have all brought oranges. It must be the season.

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Shy and blushing comes Natalie. She looks at the ground. She falls in a faint at my feet. I lift her in my arms and lave her forehead with handfuls of the sea. She comes to.

"Be happy," she says in a swoon. "I am so embarrassed. All these people... oh, oh, forgive us. I love you so. You are not in debt to me. I shall always love you. You must take whom you please."

And then she falls to crying, her lips wet with her tears on my neck.

"Natalie," I say, "you are not like the others. I shall take you with me. Have no fear."

Ecstatically she too retires to a palm. She eats an apple however. She is different.

So it goes. Three, four, five days pass in this way—talking, embracing, promising, eating apples and oranges. I have spoken to one and a half billion women—yes! I have counted assiduously. I have promised each one that I shall take her with me. It is difficult to say no. How does one say no when one is intoxicated with saying yes? Saying yes is my whiskey. It burns so pleasantly. And after the first few, the rest go down so easily! Yes, yes, yes! It is only no that tastes bitter in my mouth. And what do I care for bitterness? What do I care for...

I know. You will say, "He is a fool. He does not know how to handle his affairs. He does not appreciate fully the efficacy of saying no. He is a sensualist and cares for nothing but the moment. He has not a practical vision. He will cause nothing but anguish in this world with his infernal yes."

And so be it! Say it! I know all that! And I care not!

They sit there now, my pretty little one and a half billion; I face them with my hands on my hips. What now? I could make a dash for the ship but they would be on me, crawling over the deck, before I could hoist the mainsail. They would destroy the ship in a moment. I know something about crowds.

I turn my back to them. Bobbing up and down in the sea are the lovely mermaids with the long flowing hair—light green hair, with streaks of blonde that shimmer in the sun. Breasts high and firm, bellies silky, these creatures are not

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half fish as the mythologies say. Under the surface of the waters, from the waist down, they are womanly, with sleek strong legs. The poets have cunningly perpetrated that half fish business on the public in order to discourage exploitation.

"Ladies," I announce, suddenly, whirling around. "I must test the ship. I must take a brief spin about the harbor. I shall return shortly. And then the chosen one will join me..."

This pronouncement seems to disconcert them. There is a sullen suspicious murmur of disapproval. I walk very cautiously to the ship. I make no sudden movement that might alarm them. I walk slowly, slowly, cautiously, as a man who walks past a mad dog. I attempt to make myself invisible. I hold my breath.

The mainsail is up. I push off, I glide... glide upon the waters. I am safe, free! I glide, glide! I laugh! I wave my handkerchief in farewell! I am safe! Out of touch! The mermaids beckon me with their arms, their heads tilted slightly upward. They burst into a chorus of song—an ethereal song, fathomless and sea-struck. I cannot whistle that tune, but I hear it in my dreams—every note I know. I have heard it, every note, before. Why then can I not whistle it? I am not a bad whistler. In fact, I am rather musical. I know, like the palm of my hand, the music at the bottom of things.

There is a rustling sound below—footsteps coming up the ladder from the hold. A woman climbs on deck. She has a child cradled in her arms and a fierce expression in her eyes. Of course. One hopes beyond hope. There is no escape. One knew it all along. The mermaids make piteous lament! Their song is swallowed in the roar of the sea. There is a storm coming out of the west. There is always a storm coming out of the west; one accepts that. One never examines one's ship carefully enough. One escapes the beach, one escapes half the world, but never looks thoroughly enough into the nooks and crannies of one's own ship. One is a shithead. One hates oneself. One is not one. One is multitudinous.

"Well!" says one. "What the hell are you doing here on one's ship? And who's the brat? Never mind! Take the raft! Paddle yourselves back to shore! One is displeased! Do you

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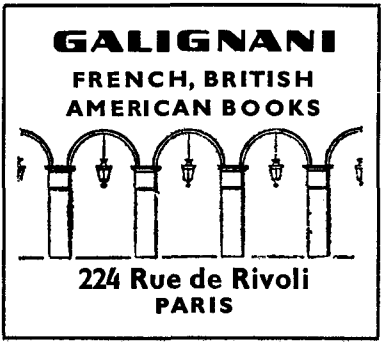
hear? Displeased!"

Without a word she loosens the chains from the raft and kicks it into the sea.

"The raft!" I cry. "What have you done?"

She says nothing. Her eyes accuse me. One is made to feel guilty by those eyes. And then the brat sets to howling. A vicious discourteous little monster. And then the storm is coming out of the west... one has set off; one is on one's voyage.

I sit on the deck, hang my hands limply over the edge... the mermaids kiss my fingertips. I go on but I know not where I go. A return to the beach is out of the question. I entertain thoughts of pushing the stowaways overboard, but they are tenacious. And then, perhaps, yes, perhaps I need them for ballast. I comfort myself with these thoughts. I contrive reasons for needing them. That is how one's mind works. One has them, one cannot rid oneself easily of them—at least not without committing a heinous crime—so one contrives reasons for needing them. One always needs what one has. If ever one allows oneself to think one does not need what one has, then one is...



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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

William Styron *(Virginia: 1831)* has been an advisory editor of THE PARIS REVIEW since its founding in 1953. He is the author of *The Long March*, *Lie Down in Darkness*, and *Set This House on Fire*. The book from which this excerpt is taken, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, will be published by Random House.

Aidan Higgins *(Langrishe, Go Down)* was born in Ireland in 1927. His first book, *Felo de Se* (published in America as *Killachter Meadow*), has been translated into seven languages. Translations of the current book into six languages are also in progress – the book will be published by Calder in England and Grove Press in America. He is now at work on a novel concerning adultery on the Costa del Sol. He is married and has three sons.

Barton Midwood *(One's Ship)* is a jazz musician. This is his first published work. He graduated from the University of Miami in 1959, and is now living in Miami.

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INTERVIEW

Gordon Harper *(Interview with Saul Bellow)* has taught English at Denison University and the University of Chicago. A student of American literary theory, he is currently completing his dissertation at Chicago on Henry James and the literary criticism of the Genteel Era.

CHRONICLE

Daniel Spoerri *(An Anecdoted Topography of Chance)* has a full biography as part of the chronicle, page 127.

Emmett Williams (translator and annotator of *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance)* has lived in France and Germany since 1949. His action-poetry and other compositions have been performed throughout the world. Galerie Der Spiegel in Cologne has just published his *13 Variations on 6 Words of Gertrude Stein.*

POETRY

Thomas Clark is currently teaching at The University of Essex after two years at Cambridge. He is the poetry editor of THE PARIS REVIEW, appearing for the first time in the magazine.

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Robert Duncan was born in Oakland, California, in 1919, and now lives in San Francisco. His most recent collection of poems is *Roots and Branches* (Scribners, 1964). He is nearing the completion of "what I'm still calling *The H.D. Book*, a study of the sources of my own poetic and the source too of a changing poetic in the study."

Max Finstein is the author of one book of poetry, *Savonarola's Tune*, published in New York in 1959. He now lives in San Francisco. Other recent poems by him appear in *Wild Dog* and in the Four Seasons Foundation pamphlet, *Writing 3*.

Steve Jonas (*complainte de l'oubli des morts*) has been published in *Measure*, *Origin*, *Set*, and many other little magazines. White Rabbit Press (San Francisco) brought out *Love*, *The Poem*, *The Sea and Other Pieces Examined* in 1957. Ferry Press in London will publish a new book of poems this year. He lives in Boston, Mass.

Barbara Guest lives in New York, and has published two books, *Location of Things* and *Poems*. She was one of the participating poets in the 1965 Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy.

Lorine Niedecker has appeared in THE PARIS REVIEW, *Poetry* and many other magazines. She lives in Milwaukee.

Philip Lamantia has published four books of poems, the most recent, *Destroyed Works* (Auerhan, 1962). In 1965 he lived in Athens, Paris, and Malaga.

Joel Oppenheimer is the author of two volumes of poetry, *The Dutiful Son* (Jargon, 1957) and *The Love Bit* (Totem, 1960). Grove Press will soon publish a book of his plays. He lives in New York.

Carl Rakosi appeared in *An "Objectivists" Anthology* in 1931 and in many of the most prominent little magazines of the 1930's. The two poems here printed date from the Thirties, but have been recently revised. Rakosi now makes his home in Minneapolis.

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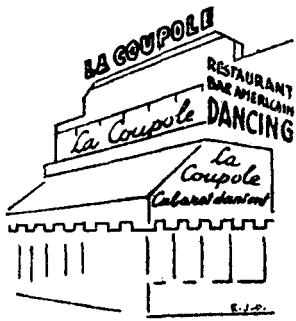
ILLUSTRATIONS

Alex Katz, the cover artist, has recently had an exposition at the Fischbach Gallery in New York. He had paintings in "Recent Landscapes by Nine Americans," a Museum of Modern Art show which toured Europe, and was also seen in the American Collage Show. He has designed sets and costumes for the Paul Taylor Dance Company.

Robert White *(Illustration for "Virginia: 1831")*, the grandson of Stanford White, studied sculpture at the Rhode Island School of Design. In 1952 he won a three-year fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. He has had seven one-man shows, and is now teaching at the N.Y. State University in Stony Brook, Long Island.

Topor (Illustrations for "*An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*") was born in Paris in 1938. He is a draughtsman and writer whose work appears frequently in the satirical review *Hara Kiri*. A book of his drawings, *Panic*, was published by City Lights Press in 1965. The English translation of *Le Locataire Chimerique*, a novel, will be published by Doubleday in March as *The Tenant*.

Jean Sobieski (*Contents Page Illustration*) studied architecture at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. He has just finished playing the leading role in a film, *La Sentinelle Endormie*, with Noel-Noel, Pascale Audret and Francis Blanche.



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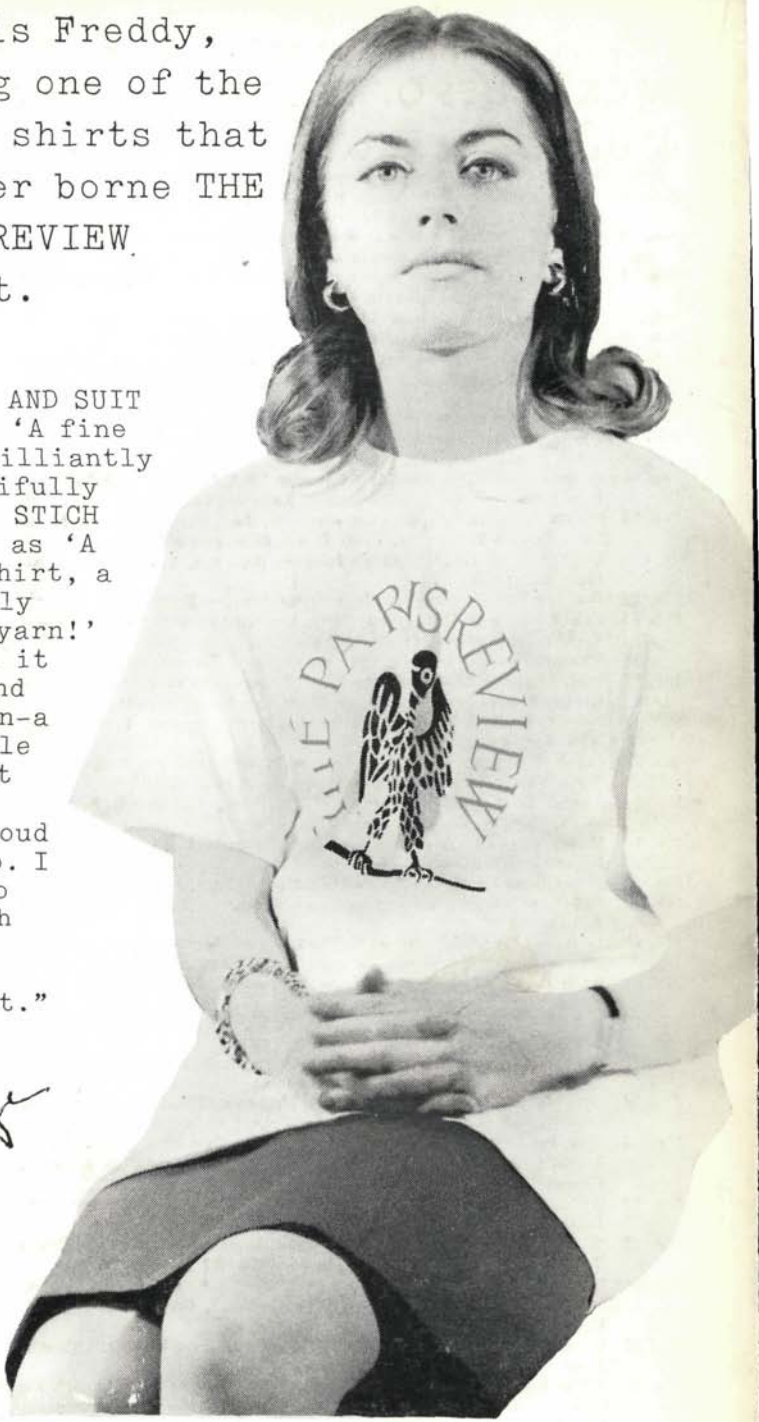

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